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**TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS'  
UNDERSTANDINGS OF HOW SELF WORTH IS INFLUENCED  
IN THE  
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT: A NEW ZEALAND  
CONTEXT**

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## Abstract

The aim of this qualitative case study is to identify how teachers and students perceive students' self worth to be influenced in the learning environment and examine the similarities and differences in the way teachers and students described these influences. Implications for classroom practice are identified.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data from four teachers and four focus groups of students aged 12-13 years from two different schools. Data was analysed using a thematic approach that allowed for identification of similarities and differences in teachers' and students' responses and provided a structure for discussion.

On analysis of the findings it is evident that aspects of the learning environment and interactions students have within the learning environment have the potential to influence students' self worth. Findings indicate that students who appear to have good self worth seem to find the learning environment a positive place to be. Good self worth is characterised by strong perceptions of ability, achievement related behaviour and positive social interactions. Poor self worth appears to be influenced by what students perceive to be under achievement with, in some instances, a relationship to negative prior experiences related to under achievement. Under achievement seems to impact on the students' conscious decision to employ a variety of avoidance-related behaviours in an attempt to limit incidences of failure in front of peers.

Findings suggest that there are four main areas of influence on students' self worth that relate to: achievement, teacher qualities, teacher strategies and connections made with significant other people such as parents/guardians and coaches. Positive self worth appears to be strongly connected to academic achievement in a reciprocal manner where each influences the other. The socio-cultural influences such as positive teacher and peer relationships and support of significant others, teacher strategies including pedagogical approach and supportive learning environments /communities that promote a sense of safety and belonging are described as fundamental to the development of self worth.

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This study discusses the need for schools to provide opportunities for holistic development where students can grow through social, emotional, ethical and academic learning experiences in a socially emotionally and physically safe learning environment. Learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches to teaching and learning appear to provide a basis on which to meet the holistic needs of students. It is clear however that the effect of more empowering pedagogical approaches is influenced heavily by the teachers' personal and professional approaches to meeting the needs of their students. This study shows that self worth is more likely to be enhanced when students feel empowered and involved in the learning process and understand their responsibility within the learning process. Teacher practice and students' response to the learning environment can be greatly enhanced through the use of critical reflective strategies that allow teachers and students to become more knowledgeable about each other and the influences of the learning environment.

Finally, evidence suggests that self worth is enhanced by a humanistic philosophy. This philosophy seems to underpin positive relationships and other socio-cultural characteristics of the classroom learning environment that enhance self worth. This is consistent with the philosophical framework of the New Zealand Curriculum (2007). Findings suggest that, if implemented authentically and with understanding this curriculum can provide a strong basis for enhancing students' self worth and achievement, and meet the all round needs of students as people, through an ethic of care.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The study of self worth can be recognised as one of the oldest, most important and perhaps most debated areas studied in social sciences over a long period of time (Marsh, 2006). It has received varying degrees of interest influenced by the political and educational climate of the time (Pajaries & Schunk, 2002) and it appears that this interest and dedication to educating about the 'self' is driven by students' standards of achievement in schools (Pajaries & Schunk, 2002). Marsh (2006) believed that the current interest in self worth from an educational perspective remains a priority. This is supported by earlier research findings (Bandura, 1986; Hattie, 2003; Hipkins, 2005).

### Context of the study

Positive self worth was connected with the academic achievement of students in and throughout their educational experiences. Research suggested that there were a variety of socio-cultural influences on students' levels of self worth and definite links between students' levels of self worth and their learning behaviours and subsequent achievement (Bean, 1991; Hipkins, 2005; Zins, as cited in Ragazzina, Resnick, O'Brien & Weissberg, 2003). Socio-cultural factors, such as positive relationships and the supportive learning environment, were fundamental to the development of self worth (Hattie, 2003; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). Adelman and Taylor (as cited in Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Walberg, 2004) suggested that if schools focus only on academic instruction in their efforts to help students attain academic success they may well fall short of their goals. This was supported by Cohen (1999) and Elias (2003) who suggested that a school's educational mission could be more successful if an holistic approach was taken in attempting to integrate students' academic, social and emotional learning.

The revision of the *New Zealand Curriculum* (2007)<sup>1</sup> has been underpinned by holistic perspectives on teaching and learning and its current implementation opens up

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<sup>1</sup> This is referred to throughout this study in its abbreviated form as NZC, 2007.



possibilities for the future for teachers and teacher educators in New Zealand (Ministry of Education<sup>2</sup>, 2007). By 2010 all New Zealand state schools are expected to teach to the NZC (2007). As teachers come to understand the content and contexts of the eight essential learning areas they will also need to understand and maintain pedagogical practices that provide effective learning opportunities for all students (Nuthall, 2007). The vision of the NZC (2007) states:

*‘Education has a vital role to play in helping our young people reach their potential and develop the competencies they need for study, work, and lifelong learning’ (p.6).*

This vision seeks to weave together the principles, values and competencies that underpin lifelong learning. The philosophy of humanism underpins this vision. Humanism has been defined as the growth and holistic development of people (Cave, 2009; Farmer, 2001). Cave (2009) suggests humanistic philosophy underpins the individuals’ beliefs and ability about the ‘self’ and self improvement. Important to this study of self worth is the concept of humanism.

Humanistic philosophy is evident in the NZC (2007) through the four aspects that underpinned the vision: confidence, connectedness, lifelong learning, and active involvement. Self worth is more explicitly evident through the ‘confidence’ aspect, where educational outcomes such as positive personal identity, resilience and motivation are encouraged. The MOE (2007) suggested these aspects had the potential to empower young New Zealanders to stand tall, seize opportunities, overcome obstacles, and make a difference. This makes self worth an integral part of the holistic development of students.

Five key competencies have been identified in the NZC (2007) and therefore recognised by the MOE as capabilities that people require for developing aspects of holistic development.

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<sup>2</sup> This is referred to throughout the study in its abbreviated form as MOE.

The five key competencies are:

1. Thinking
2. Using language, symbols, and texts
3. Managing self
4. Relating to others
5. Participating and contributing

(NZC, 2007, p.12).

The curriculum links the concept of self worth to one of these competencies, ‘managing self’ which involves skills related to self-motivation and a ‘can-do’ attitude (MOE, 2006, p.11).

## **Significance of the study**

It has been stated that enhancing self worth cannot be separated from the educational process (Bandura, 1986). This has been reinforced by the consistent attempt to research the emotional and affective aspects of students’ learning in the past and present (Beane, 1991; Dewey, 1948; Goleman, 1995; Hipkins, 2005; Rogers, 1983). The early eighties elicited an emergence of self related research which resulted in the promotion of self esteem programmes. These programmes could be bought and delivered to students in schools in the hope that this would make students feel better about their learning and enhance achievement (Beane, 1991; Hipkins, 2005). Isolating the self worth aspects of learning to packages you could buy proved to be less than positive and only contributed to what Stout (2000) described as a feel good curriculum. In contrast is the view that self worth related learning needs to be embedded into school culture and curriculum delivery to ensure it meets the holistic needs of students and is of relevance to their learning needs (Beane, 1991; Hipkins, 2005).

Enhancing self worth continues to be a concern (Marsh, 2006) and this is no different in education in New Zealand. The focus on enhancing self worth in New Zealand education is evident in the National Education Goals (MOE, 2004) which emphasise opportunities that allow students to reach their full potential, and remove barriers to achievement.

## **Topic and aims of the study**

The aim of this research is to investigate teachers' and students' understandings of how self worth can be influenced in the learning environment. With a view to further enhancing competencies like 'managing self', it is of value to examine the similarities and differences between teachers' and students' understandings of self worth and how teachers and students perceive self worth to be enhanced in the classroom. Siefert's (2004) definition has been used in this study to define self worth. Siefert (2004) defines self worth as 'A judgement one makes about one's sense of worth and dignity as a person' (p. 140).

## **Research questions**

1. How do teachers' and students describe 'good' self worth and 'poor' self worth?
2. From a teachers' and students' perspective how is self worth influenced in the learning environment?
  - What are the similarities and differences in teachers' and students' responses to questions one and two?

## Summary

This chapter has introduced the research topic and outlined the significance of the study. This has been achieved by presenting how self worth has been viewed and catered for in education in the past and present, and how self worth is related to the *NZC* (2007).

A brief description of the complexity of self worth was provided earlier when describing the context of the study. This was followed by outlining the connection between self worth and the socio-cultural context of the learning environment. The revision of the *NZC* (2007) was discussed and the prospects for enhancing self worth were acknowledged. This chapter concluded by presenting the research questions.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

This chapter reviews the literature relating to self worth and other previously associated terms. The first section relates to the ‘self’ and is underpinned by the understanding that individuals have psychological needs and that the fulfilment of these needs influences perceptions and behaviour. The concept of self worth is reviewed through literature associated with beliefs, attitudes and motivation towards learning. The second section relates to the social context of the classroom and how social and cultural characteristics influences perception and behaviour associated with self worth. The influence of teacher/student and peer relationships and socio-cultural characteristics of the learning environment are reported and reviewed. The third section reports on the concept of self worth in the *NZC* (2007). This section examines how self worth is incorporated in the philosophy of the *NZC* (2007) and how self worth can be enhanced through quality teaching and the effective use of pedagogy.

### **Defining self worth**

Purkey (1970) described the ‘self’ as not only complex but as a dynamic system of beliefs which an individual holds true about him/herself. Further to this, Lawrence (1987) described the ‘ideal self’, and suggested that there was ideal characteristics one believed they should or could possess.

While the emphasis of research related to self worth had varied over time, the last two to three decades had brought about a re-emergence of self worth related study. Studies of self worth in the past had been challenged on the basis that research design was weak and there was a lack of consistent findings (Hattie, 1992; Shavelson, Hubner & Stanton, 1976). Analysis of self worth related research was that much of it had been designed around quantitative methodologies with the purpose being to measure and quantify self worth (Hattie, 1992).

Marsh (2006) suggested that current studies in education and psychology had made important advances in theory, measurement, research and practice. Marsh (2006) described a research approach developed from the work of Shavelson *et al* (1976) that was underpinned by qualitative methodology and recognised the need to acknowledge the multifaceted structure of self concept. Marsh (2006) and Shavelson *et al* (1976) intimated that self concept could not be adequately understood if its multidimensionality was ignored, thus reinforcing the need for qualitative research methodologies. It was therefore essential that a clear definition of self worth was sought and/or maintained for this study and an adequate understanding of the multidimensional nature of self worth was reflected throughout this study.

In this study self worth has been defined as **‘A judgement one makes about one’s sense of worth and dignity as a person’** (Siefert, 2004, p.140) and while self worth will be referred to as the main concept it will be supported by other concepts that contribute to the individual’s overall sense of self. It is evident that to some degree related terms can be used interchangeably. This is not uncommon in educational and psychological literature where terms such as ‘self concept’, ‘self esteem’, ‘self perception’, and ‘self worth’ have been used in reference to the individuals’ cognitions and feelings about the self (Humphrey, 2004; Lawrence, 1996). Important however is the need to define these terms and how they interrelate.

Definitions of ‘self concept’, ‘ideal self’, ‘self esteem’ and ‘self efficacy’ are as follows:

- **Self concept**

Descriptive in nature and used to describe the individual’s perceived competencies (Shavelson, *et al* 1976, p.422).

- **Ideal self**

Inspirational in nature and used in reference to an individual’s pretensions (how they would like to be) (Humphreys, 2004, p.348).

- **Self esteem**

An evaluation of personal worth based on the difference between one's ideal self and one's self concept (Humphreys, 2004, p.348).

- **Self efficacy**

An individual's perceptions of their ability to achieve (Bandura, 1986, p.391).

Humphreys (2004) reinforced the need to define and use constructs such as 'self concept', 'ideal self', and 'self esteem' in attempting to describe self worth and suggested there was a mutual interdependence between them and it was not always possible to describe one effectively without the other. Additional terms and concepts were used throughout this paper and their relationship to self worth was described as they were introduced.

## **The 'self' in self worth theory**

Self worth theory is based on a premise that everybody has a level of self worth that appears to be correlated to well being and is essential to human functioning (Covington, 1984, 1992; Siefert, 2004). Of interest to this study is that in the classroom learning environment, particularly in Western culture, self worth has been equated to ability associated with performance and achievement (Covington, 1984, 1992; Siefert, 2004).

The concept of self worth, if viewed from an holistic humanistic perspective in education, involves four contributing considerations:

1. The cognitive (thinking)
  2. The affective (feeling)
  3. The behavioural (action)
  4. Values (cohesion between actions and values associated with self)
- (Bandura, 1986).

Through exploration of the self from an holistic perspective, the relationship between affective and behavioural characteristics of self worth could be considered in relation to classroom behaviour and attitudes to learning and achievement. Farmer (2001) suggested teachers needed to be able to view the whole person acknowledging that too often they saw only a part of the student. With this in mind he suggested that Maslow's Theory of Self Actualisation (1962) was an appropriate example of a tool for viewing the whole child from a humanistic perspective. He argued that because the self system is concerned with the development of the whole child an holistic consideration is important and needed to be thoughtfully implemented in classroom practice with appropriate pedagogy. Farmer (2001) stated:

*'Humanistic practices are too often used by humanely intended teachers who often lack a theoretical rationale with which to support and justify these worthy innovations. Thus the result that humanistic methods and materials too often become a purposeless grab-bag of tricks for bored teachers and students' (p.163).*

In drawing links back to humanism and self worth, Branden (cited in Marsh, 2006) and Marsh (2006) argued that there were strong correlations between self worth and the growth of the whole person. They suggested self worth was highly relevant to both individual and societal wellbeing (Branden, as cited in Marsh, 2006; Marsh, 2006). Branden (as cited in Marsh, 2006) stated:

*'I cannot think of a single psychological problem – from anxiety to depression, to under-achievement at school or at work, to fear of intimacy, happiness or success, to alcohol or drug abuse, to spouse battering or child molestation, to co-dependency and sexual disorders, to passivity and chronic aimlessness, to suicide and crimes of violence – that is not traceable, at least in part, to the problem of deficient self worth.'* (p.6).



## **Self concept and self efficacy**

Self concept, as described earlier, is a descriptive term relating to the cognitive appraisal the individual makes about their ability (Hattie, 1992; Humphreys, 2004). As Humphreys (2004) suggested, there were strong connections between self concept and self worth, relating to the individuals 'perceived competencies, perceptions of ability, confidence and the individual's overall worth.

Shavelson *et al* (1976) identified seven features that were critical to the definition of the self concept of which two have particular relevance to this study. The following two features were of relevance to this study:

1. Self concept is hierarchical, with perceptions of personal behaviour in specific situations at the base of the hierarchy, inferences about self in broader domains, e.g., social, physical, and academic, at the middle of the hierarchy, and a global, general self concept at the apex.
2. Self concept has both a descriptive and an evaluative aspect such that individuals may describe themselves ('I am happy') and evaluate themselves ('I do well in mathematics'). Evaluations can be made against some absolute ideal (the five minute mile, a personal, internal standard based on comparisons with peers or the expectations of significant others. Individuals may differentially weight specific dimensions (Shavelson, *et al* 1976, pp.411-415).

According to Humphreys (2004) and Shavelson *et al* (1976) self concept was underpinned largely by self perception. Shavelson *et al* (1976) suggested that the development of self concept was hierarchical and self perception formed the basis of this hierarchy. Further to this other evidence suggested that emotions about the self, and perceptions of self, impacted on the individual's ability to achieve (Bandura, 1977, as cited in McInerney & Van Etten, 2005; Hattie, 1997; Hipkins, 2005; Hudley & Eskeles-Gottfried, 2008; Maslow, 1997, as cited in Boeree, 1998; Pajares, 2002; Shavelson *et al*, 1976; Siefert, 2004).

Similarly, Bandura (1977, as cited in McInerney & Van Etten, 2005) suggested that behaviour is more often influenced by the beliefs people have about their capabilities than their actual ability. This emphasised the significance of positive self feelings and beliefs and consequently the potential to enhance self worth. Self feelings and beliefs could be described using the term 'self efficacy', defined by Bandura (1986) as the 'individual's judgements of performance capabilities in a particular domain' (p.446).

Bandura (1986) and Siefert (2004) suggested many students had difficulty in school not because they were incapable of performing successfully but because they were incapable of believing that they could perform successfully. Similarly Cohen (1999) suggested there were difficulties in trying to separate 'self feelings' from the mastery in any given subject. It may have been that a students had a good self concept and high self worth but may not have had the ability to believe that they could achieve, and as a result, did not have the understanding about how to take the required action to succeed (Cohen, 1999; Pajares, 2002; Siefert, 2004). Self efficacy had the potential to affect behaviour in certain ways, including; choice of activity, goals, effort and persistence, and ultimately, learning and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Schunk & Pajares, as cited in McInerney & Van Etten, 2005; Siefert, 2004).

While Siefert (2004) believed in the importance of perceptions of ability he suggested it was the affect of these perceptions that provided some understanding towards students' achievement-related behaviour and motivation to learning. He described the following effects:

- Success which comes from high ability will result in feelings of pride and self esteem.
- Success which comes from low effort implies high ability and will result in feelings of pride and self esteem.
- Failure that is a result of low effort may lead to feelings of guilt.
- Failure that is the result of low ability may lead to feelings of shame and humiliation.
- High effort which results in failure implies low ability leading to feelings of shame and humiliation.

## **Achievement**

There were definite links between students' levels of self worth and their learning behaviours and subsequent achievement (Beane, 1991; Hipkins, 2005; Zins as cited in Ragazzina, Resnick, O'Brien & Weissberg, 2003; Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 2001). Scott, Murray, Mertens and Dustin (2001) suggested that academically and interpersonally students' self esteem was affected daily by external evaluation within the school system and with this in mind stressed the importance of the overall school experience for the student. They believed that essential to maintaining and/or enhancing self worth within the school experience were:

- the teachers understanding of self worth
- how self worth is manifest within the planning and implementation of curriculum within the classroom and out into the broader school environment ( p.288).

The significance of achievement/success is reinforced by Hattie (1997) and Crocker and Park (2004) who suggested that succeeding in one area could often lead to increased success in other areas enhancing confidence and impacting positively on the individual's sense of self efficacy and overall self worth. They described a 'snowballing effect' suggesting that if individuals meet their goals they were more likely to see themselves as successful at not only their goals but as successful people in general.

This 'snowballing effect' had the potential to be positive for students who were succeeding but had the opposite effect for those who did not experience success (Bandura, 1986; Crocker & Park, 2004). Bandura (1986) and Crocker and Park (2004) suggested students who failed may have seen themselves as failing people. Bandura (1986) stated that 'failure to learn lead students to make attributions to inherent personal deficiencies, which were de-motivating and self-handicapping' (p.445). This reinforced the view that accomplishment equalled human value implicating that individuals were only as worthy as their achievement (Covington, 1984, cited in Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 2001). Another contributing factor impacting on self worth and achievement,

and influenced by self belief and achievement was motivation to achieve (Brophy, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

## **Motivation**

Ryan and Deci (2000) provided a definition of motivation based on a behavioural model that suggested 'being moved meant to be moved to do something' (p.54). According to this there was evidence as to why motivation had been described as a fundamental aspect to learning (Brewer & Burgess, 2005). Nilson (2007, 2009) suggested that motivation was complex and described it as dynamic and multifaceted. McInerney (2005) recognised that over the last 25 years there had been a growth from behavioural models of motivation to cognitive interpretations. These interpretations had a strong impact on the ways in which classroom and school structure and learning was viewed. McInerney (2005) provided a summary of six points related to motivation and self worth.

1. Teachers, schools, and classrooms should emphasise mastery goals and de-emphasise performance goals.
2. Students should be encouraged to be originators rather than pawns in their approaches to learning.
3. Feelings of personal worth directly relate to learning and achievement;
4. Self determination and choice may be key elements of effective motivation and learning.
5. Attributions for success and failure to internal and controllable causes such as effort are more likely to enhance motivation and achievement than attributions to external and uncontrollable causes such as luck.
6. Expectations for success and valuing success are important ingredients of school achievement (p.593).

Nilson (2007; 2009) suggested that students could be motivated in multiple ways and suggested that motivation was contextual. Maslow (1962) described motivation using the term self actualisation which was defined as a continuous desire to fulfil potential. He suggested that self actualisation was the motivation to want to be the best you could be. Self actualisation was at the top of what Maslow (as cited in Brophy, 2004, p.6) described as a hierarchy of needs.

The hierarchy of needs consists of five levels:



**Figure 1: Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1962)**

The concept of self actualisation, defined above, is consistent with Bandura's (1986) thinking associated with action and/or behaviours (self efficacy). There were however implications as self actualisation, and therefore constructs like self efficacy, were situated at the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962). They relied heavily on the levels below to contribute positively to the individual's overall ability to believe and motivation to achieve. Foundational to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs were physiological, safety and belonging needs (Brophy, 2004). Students would need to feel satisfied (not hungry or tired), safe and loved, therefore be living in environments where they felt safe and loved, before they could have the capacity to function adequately in their learning environment let alone demonstrate motivation to learn.

Motivation to learn could be examined through intrinsic and extrinsic motivational approaches to learning (Brophy, 2004; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Brophy (2004) stated 'it is only recently that intrinsic motivation theorists have recognised that extrinsic forms of motivation can complement the development of intrinsic motivation' (p. 184).

Brophy (2004) suggested that theorists had recognised that in some cases autonomy increased as individuals moved from purely extrinsic motivation to mixed forms of intrinsic motivation'. Intrinsic motivation was described by Nilsen (2009) as 'a tendency to engage in tasks because one found them interesting and enjoyable' (p. 547).

Students who were intrinsically motivated were more likely to be cognitively engaged in what they were doing and experienced a higher quality of learning and creativity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested there were connections between intrinsic motivation and self worth. They believed intrinsically motivating activities provide satisfaction of some psychological needs such as feelings of competence and autonomy. Similarly, characteristics of intrinsic motivation had been described by Brophy (2004) as self actualising, competence enhancing, meaningful and worthwhile and by Alderman (1999) as a 'construct that had the potential for enhancing interest, challenge and learning satisfaction' (p.211).

An example of intrinsic motivation was described by Deci and Ryan (2000) as Self-Determination Theory which emphasised the emancipatory and autonomous aspects of being and doing. Similarly, Brophy (2004) described self determination as ‘intrinsically motivated actions that people engaged in because they wanted to’ (p.10).

There were however limitations for self determination and other intrinsic motivational strategies in an educational setting (Brophy, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Brophy (2004) stated ‘When people were intrinsically motivated to learn, their learning usually featured leisurely exploration to satisfy curiosity rather than sustained efforts to accomplish explicit knowledge’ (p.13). This will be discussed further in the section related to the classroom as a community.

Brophy (2004) and Seifert (2004) described avoidance strategies in some depth. They both suggested that a child’s perception of passing a test was controlled by causes that had a particular set of characteristics. These characteristics had behavioural consequences, for example, a child who attributed success or failure to internal, controllable causes was more likely to feel pride, satisfaction, confidence and have a higher sense of self esteem and as a result maintain their level of self-confidence and/or self worth. This was consistent with the term ‘attribution theory’ described by Siefert (2004) as ‘the perceived cause of an outcome; a person’s explanation of why a particular event turned out as it did’ (p. 138).

Weiner (as cited in Siefert, 2004) suggested there was a connection between attributions and consequent behaviours such as motivation. Siefert (2004) suggested however that it could in fact be the students’ perceptions of attributions which influenced motivation.

Perceptions of attribution had been explained more clearly by Weiner (as cited in Siefert, 2004) through three characteristics which are outlined as follows:

1. Locus of causality (a cause that originates within the individual, for example, effort)
2. Stability (a cause stable and enduring or changing for example illness)
3. Controllability (the individual is able to effect the cause, for example, amount of study) (p.140).

Deci and Ryan (2000) expanded on their original version of self determination describing processes of internalisation and integration. They suggested that existing external or extrinsic processes could be developed to become internal or integrated processes of motivation. Rohrkemper and Corno (cited in Brophy, 2004) used the term 'self regulated learning' to describe intrinsic motivation. They suggested self regulated learning was one of the highest forms of cognitive engagement and intrinsic motivation that students could use in the classroom. They believed however that self regulated learning was a skill that could be learned. This was supported by Alderman (1999) who made a connection between self regulated learning and intrinsic motivation and suggested that intrinsic motivation was malleable and could be developed. Consequently, it could be feasible to suggest that the more students determine their own actions the more intrinsic their motivation could be, and therefore less extrinsic motivation would be required (Alderman, 1999; Brophy, 2004; Ormrod, 2008).

In recognising that it was not always possible to intrinsically engage students in learning the need to explore extrinsic motivational strategies was necessary. The classic notion of extrinsic motivation suggested the individuals engaged in tasks for the purpose of obtaining unrelated rewards or outcomes such as prizes (Brophy, 2004; Vansteenkiste, Lens, & Deci, 2006). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggested however that there were different types of motivation that fell into the category of extrinsic motivation. This was consistent with Alderman (1999) who suggested that extrinsic motivation could be represented on a continuum from most extrinsic to least extrinsic illustrating the extent to which the student was influenced by external reinforcers.



Educationalists suggested that classical extrinsic motivational strategies had come under much critique (Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001). Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) suggested 'external rewards as an aspect of extrinsic motivation encouraged students to strive for the reward rather than for achievement' (p.140).

Research suggested that classical extrinsic motivational strategies were more likely to be seen as a control of behaviour as opposed to motivation to learn (Brophy, 2004; Lepper & Hodell, 1989, as cited in Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2001).

Brophy (1983) stated however, in support of external motivation, that the contexts for learning in classrooms were not necessarily intrinsically motivating for students and the less intrinsically motivating activities were, the more extrinsic motivation was required. Literature suggested that intrinsically and extrinsically motivating strategies could be complementary and both contributed in various ways to self worth and achievement (Alderman, 1999; Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ormrod, 2008; Rohrkemper & Corno, as cited in Brophy, 2004)

## **Socio-cultural factors**

This section explores the influence of relationships and the learning environment on self worth from a socio-cultural perspective. It examines the influence of teacher/student relationships on self worth focussing more specifically on the qualities of passionate teachers, teachers who make strong connections with their students and those who provide effective feedback as strategies deemed to enhance self worth. Classroom culture is explored with an emphasis on learning and behaviour associated with peer relationships. The concept of the classroom as a community is discussed with specific emphasis on the 'belonging' aspect as a consideration for enhancing students' self worth and learning.

Literature suggested teachers' and students' participation in the teaching and learning process was interrelated and inseparable from the socio-cultural context in which it occurred (Bandura, 1986; Brophy, 2004; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). This

was reinforced by Nuthall (2007) who described the importance of recognising and understanding the multilayered relationship between teaching and learning within the context of the classroom. He reinforced the significance of teacher/student relationships, peer culture and other socio-cultural factors such as 'connectedness' layered into the teaching and learning process and the relationship these factors had to students' self worth.

Bandura (1986) reinforced the socio-cultural perspective suggesting human behaviour was a result of a co-existence between the 'self-system' and external sources of influence (Bandura, 1977, cited in Pajares, 2002; Brophy, 2004; Schunk & Pajares, 2004; Zimmerman & Schunk, 2003), in this case classroom relationships and the learning environment. According to Bandura (as cited in Tollefson, 2000) people developed their personal sense of self efficacy from four sources:

1. Performance accomplishment
2. Observation of the performance of others
3. Verbal persuasion and related types of social influence
4. States of physiological arousal from which they judge personal capabilities and vulnerability (p.68).

### **Teacher/student relationships in a socio-cultural learning environment**

Research suggested that teacher/student relationships were a significant influence on self worth and overall achievement (Beane, 1991; Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2001, 2008; Humphreys, 2001, 2003, 2004; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Puurula, Neill, Vasileiou, Husbands, Lang, Katz, Romi, Menezes, Vriens, 2001; Townsend & McWhirther, 2005).

Humphreys (2001) argued:

*‘Teachers strongly influence the self esteem (worth) of their pupils because they are perceived as experts and authority figures, and also because they are one of two primary sources of feedback about scholastic competence (the other being the child’s peer group)’ (as cited in Humphreys, 2003, p.350).*

Similarly, Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) reinforced the role and influence of the classroom teacher suggesting that explicit use of positive and constructive language and carefully chosen teaching strategies had the potential to enhance self worth. This was reinforced by Nuthall (2007) who described the role of sensitivity in student/teacher interactions. He suggested that if teachers were to change what students thought and what they believed about themselves and learning there was a lot more than teacher involvement and motivation required.

Beane (1991) recognised that the individual was a social being living in a social environment and influenced by sociological factors. Similarly Hipkins (2005) provided a socio-cultural view that the individual was constructed in a web of relationships with other people. She suggested ‘that it was the sum of these relationships that in complex and shifting ways determined who and what individuals could be and do at any given time’ (p.8). In recognition of the above, the need to view student relationships and learning from a socio-cultural perspective is evident (Alton-Lee, 2003; Beane, 1991; Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007).

Riggs & Bright (as cited in Townsend & McWhirther, 2005) identified some crucial components of psychological growth that occurred through the forming of relationships within a socio-cultural environment:

- Increased sense of well being that comes from feeling connected to others.
- Motivation and the ability to act positively both within and beyond the boundaries of the relationship.
- Increased self-knowledge and knowledge of the 'other' in the relationship.
- Increased sense of self worth.
- Desire for additional connections (p.220).

Hipkins (2005) reinforced the need for individuals to form connections with others. Forming connections was described in the literature using the term 'connectedness' (Maslow, 1967; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002; Townsend & McWhirther, 2005). The term 'connectedness' was associated with human need and had the potential to influence self worth (Maslow, 1962; Townsend & McWhirther, 2005). Similarly Scott, Murray, Mertens and Dustin (2001) reported that 'good social skills' and making connections with others was indicative of high self worth and a good remedy for low self worth.

An emphasis on the concept of connectedness was evident in the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (2002). This strategy was underpinned by principles that defined the role of the teacher. These principles outlined the importance of quality relationships and suggested teachers could develop quality relationships with young people and could help their students learn to develop quality relationships with other people (p.7).

Nuthall (2007) believed that quality teacher/student relationships required teachers to have a good understanding of their students. He believed that for teachers to make strong connections with their students, with the view to enhancing self worth they required understanding of how students operated in the classroom.

He suggested students lived their lives in the classroom within the context of three different and interacting worlds.

- **The public world**

The world that is most obvious when you walk into a classroom where the public rules and customs of the classroom are evident.

- **The semiprivate world**

The world where students establish their social roles and status. The peer relationship world flows over into out-of-class activities.

- **The private world of the child's own mind**

The world where children's knowledge and beliefs change and grow; where self beliefs, self worth and attitudes have their effects; where individual thinking and learning takes place. This world, continuous over all aspects of a child's life, brings home life into the school and playground, and brings school life back into the home (p.84).

The NZC (2007) suggested that in order to develop a sense of connectedness with the view to enhancing self worth, students needed opportunities to; experience a caring and supportive environment, feel that they were contributing something of value to society, discover that they had choices about their own wellbeing and learn to give and receive positive feedback (p.9).

## **Ethic of care**

There has always been a professional obligation expected of teachers to attend to the wellbeing of their students and this has been characterised by acts of care and support consistent with pastoral care (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). McGee and Fraser (2008) acknowledged that there had been a growing interest in recent years in what was being referred to as an 'ethic of care'. An 'ethic of care' appeared to infiltrate relationships in various ways. Wentzel (as cited in Alton-Lee, 2003) suggested students perceived their teachers to be caring when they cared about them as

individuals but also when the teacher listened and cared about teaching, provided feedback and assistance. Similarly, Noddings (1995, 2001) reinforced the care attached to teaching and learning decisions. She considered pedagogical caring as taking into account the design of curriculum through context choice and learning activities and the influence of these decisions related to pedagogical care on relationships in the learning environment.

### **Formative feedback – enhancing connections between teachers and their students**

Clarke, Timperley and Hattie (2001) suggested that it was information provided to the student by the teacher that lead to changes in student learning. Additionally, Timperley (2007) acknowledged the strength in formative feedback as a strategy for developing teacher/student relationships and enhancing self worth. Clarke, Timperley and Hattie (2001) recognised equally that the impact on self worth could be both positive and negative depending on the nature and delivery of the feedback. This was evident through a synthesis of literature from Burnett (2002), Dweck (1999) and Marsh (1990) that suggested *ability* feedback created vulnerability in students while *effort* feedback fostered hardiness and a stronger sense of self confidence. Clarke, Timperley and Hattie (2001) supported the use of formative assessment and feedback. They suggested an eleven point framework for raising students' self worth through formative assessment. The following eight points from this framework related specifically to teacher feedback and praise:

1. Encourage children to be self-evaluative about their performances related to the learning intention during whole class sessions and during the course of the lesson.
2. When children find something difficult or are stuck, use language which shows that experiencing difficulty enables us to find out what is needed for new learning to take place.
3. Make all feedback focus on learning rather than effort.
4. Encourage children to self mark and be involved in paired marking, looking for success and improvement against learning intentions.

5. Organise individual targets with an optimistic focus: build on previous attainment.
6. Provide comments about the performance, rather than using grades or marks.
7. Replace external rewards with explicit focus on the achievement gained, celebrating achievement privately, face-to-face rather than publicly.
8. Replace meaningless praise with encouragement (pp.151 – 152).

Effective feedback had the potential to provide more for the student than enhancing learning (Burnett, 2002; Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 2001; Thompson, 1997). Scott, Murray, Mertens and Dustin, (2001) reported ‘for school personnel to make an enduring difference in students’ self worth, they must construct a consistent and ongoing series of specific situations in which students could receive both positive and constructive feedback’ (p.292).

They suggested that it was through the process of receiving positive and constructive feedback that students would develop a better understanding of themselves and the values and judgements on which their self worth was developed (Scott, Murray, Mertens & Dustin, 2001). Additionally, Burnett (2002) reported that student/teacher relationships and students’ perceptions of their classroom, themselves and learning increased when they were provided with both ability and effort feedback by their teachers.

Brophy (1981, 2004) reinforced the use of constructive praise in the classroom suggesting it could build self worth, provide encouragement, and enhance relationships between teachers and their students. Praise as a form of teacher to student feedback tended to be associated with positive feedback relating to student behaviour. It meant to ‘value highly’ and was defined as ‘commending the worth of an individual or expressing admiration or approval’ (Blöte, 1995, as cited in Burnett, 2002, p. 6). Burnett (2001) measured the preferences for teacher praise of 747 students aged from 8 – 12 years. Results indicated that 91% of these students preferred to be praised often or sometimes by their teachers and 9% reported that they did not want to be praised at all. Further analysis of the results indicated that 84% of students preferred to be praised for

trying hard or putting in effort, over the 16% who responded to praise for having ability (as cited in Burnett, 2002, p.7).

As with feedback, praise could be delivered in varying ways and as a result had varying effects. Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) while recognising the place of praise, acknowledged that excess praise could be a limiting factor on the development of self worth. They suggested that excessive praise could affect the student's ability to self-evaluate and develop independence. General praise had a different purpose and outcome to that of constructive praise when implemented as a preventative management tool. Constructive praise had the potential to enhance self worth and influence learning (Burnett, 2002; Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Thompson, 1997).

Praise could affect individuals in different ways (Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Thompson, 1997). Thompson (1997) suggested teachers needed to identify the attributional message implied by their praise/feedback. Public praise, for example, while seen to be positive could have a detrimental effect. It could cause tension between students and as a result discomfort through negative social consequences such as bullying and teasing (Burnett, 2001; Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001). Similarly Burnett (as cited in Burnett, 2002) reported that more students preferred to be praised quietly as opposed to publicly. He suggested that if teachers met students' preferences for praise they would praise students for their effort, privately and more often.

### **Relationships with peers**

It was evident that the influence of peers impacted significantly on the development of individual self worth and achievement (Bandura, 1997; Bishop & Inderbritzen, 1995; Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Ginsburg-Block, as cited in Hudley & Gottfried, 2008; Hattie, 2002; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Townsend & Whirter, 2005). However, it was important to distinguish between peer group relationships and friendship relationships (Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk & Wojslawowicz; 2005). Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk and Wojslawowicz (2005) described friendships or peer relationships as close or mutual and included reciprocity and a feeling of perceived



equality between individuals whereas ‘peer group’ related to status and/or culture within a particular group.

### **Relationships with friendship**

Gifford-Smith and Brownell (2002) suggested by middle childhood more than 30% of children’s social interactions involved peers. They suggested these changes produced both new demands and new opportunities for social and emotional growth. This was reinforced by Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk & Wojslawowicz (2005) who suggested that student friendships had the potential to provide support, self worth enhancement and positive self evaluation. In general, classroom friendships had been linked to the development of students’ self worth (Nuthall, 2007). However friendships had also been described as developmental and therefore dynamic meaning that they may not have always been self worth enhancing (Nuthall, 2007; Parker & Gottman, as cited in Rubin *et al*, 2005). Parker and Gottman (cited in Rubin *et al*, 2005) described friendships from a developmental perspective, suggesting that they served different functions for students at different points of their development.

### **Peer groups/peer culture**

Literature suggested peer groups (not necessarily friendships) were a strong socialising influence for students and the development of their self worth (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2003; Hartup, & Kinderman, 1993, as cited in Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk & Wojslawowicz, 2005). What and how students learned, including social and emotional learning, was bound up with their peer culture/peer group (Gifford-Smith & Brownell, 2002; Nuthall, 2007). Nuthall (2007), and Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) believed that social status within a particular peer group was a strong socialising element and influenced the way students interacted within their learning environment.

The way students interacted within their learning environment could be influenced by the way they felt about interactions within their peer groups. Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) acknowledged that students who felt accepted by their peers were more likely to

feel better about themselves and to achieve at school and recognised equally that students who were not well accepted were at greater risk of feeling poor about themselves and of being less successful at school. This strong influence of peer relationships fuelled the need for students to feel accepted by their peers.

Ginsburg-Block (as cited in Hudley & Gottfried, 2008) described the influence of peer culture in relation to students' social motivation. They suggested peers, over their teachers, had the potential to be a greater influence on change, which could mean change related to students' self worth. This thinking was consistent with Bandura (1997) who suggested that peer relationships were significant because student models of motivation and appropriate behaviour were more similar to their peers than they were to adults in their learning environment. Nurturing and growing friendships within the learning environment and recognising the significance of peer group culture in the classroom community was seen as fundamental to effective practice and enhancing self worth (Ginsburg-Block, cited in Hudley & Gottfried, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Rubin, Coplan, Chen, Buskirk & Wojslawowicz, 2005).

## **Socialisation**

Students' awareness and understanding of their learning environment, and the social interactions within their learning environment, were contributing factors to the ongoing development of self worth (Brophy, 2004; Humphreys, 2001; Nuthall, 2007). This understanding could be associated with the concept of socialisation which could be described as the blending of an individual within a particular social setting (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2000; Merton, as cited in Templin & Schemp, 1989). Merton (as cited in Templin and Schemp, 1989) defined socialisation as 'a process by which people selectively acquired the values and attitudes, the interests, skills and knowledge – in short, the culture – current in groups to which they were, or sought to become, a member of (p.2).

Templin and Schemp (1989) agreed but reinforced the importance of the way individuals negotiated and learnt within their learning environment and how they

interpreted interactions within their learning environment. Brophy (2004) described three general strategies for establishing a learning environment favourable to socialising students to learn.

The three strategies were:

1. Teacher modelling – model own motivation to learn
2. Communicate desirable expectations and attributions
3. Minimise performance anxiety (pp. 270 – 274).

Effective classroom socialisation relied on more holistic approaches in teaching and learning that met the needs of students socially, emotionally and academically. (Adelman & Taylor, 2000; Elias, 2003; Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg & Walberg, 2004).

### **Classrooms as communities for learning**

This section synthesises a very small part of the depth and breadth of literature associated with communities of learning. While literature relating to communities and learning has been introduced here the emphasis of this section is to explore the idea of ‘community’ in the classroom and how aspects of classroom community relates to enhancing self worth. Nuthall (2007) defined a classroom community as ‘a learning environment where everyone feels he or she has something to contribute to classroom activities and where everyone takes responsibility for learning’ (p. 162).

This definition of a classroom community was supported by McGee and Fraser (2008) who suggested the need to co-create a culture or sense of community in classrooms with students that provided each and every student with a ‘place to stand’. They suggested that it was the teachers’ responsibility to not only monitor the culture of the classroom by recognising differences and addressing injustices but to mould the learning environment as a safe place to be for all students. Alton-Lee (2003), and McGee and

Fraser (2008) expressed the importance of creating an environment where the emotional and psychological wellbeing of students, inclusive of self worth, could be nurtured.

There was however great variation in, firstly, the way a community of learning was defined and secondly how 'community' was seen to influence learning and classroom management and self worth. (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2003; Osterman, 2000; Watkins, 2005). To understand the concept of 'community' it was necessary to outline the idea of a community of learning.

Watkins (2005) suggested that the following were symbolic characteristics of a community of learning:

- **Agency**

All members need to believe that they can and do make real choices and take action, intentionally and knowingly.

- **Belonging**

Members need to feel part of the classroom and school, experiencing a sense of respect, acceptance, inclusion and support.

- **Cohesion**

As people act and develop a sense of belonging they develop a sense of commitment and cohesion.

- **Diversity**

Differences are viewed positively not as a threat which tends to lead to a reduction in stereotyping and an increase in the development of complex ideas (pp. 33 – 35).

Of particular importance to this study was the aspect related to belonging. Belonging in the classroom has been related to concepts such as caring and a sense of community (Alton-Lee, 2003; Osterman, 2000). Additionally Alton-Lee (2003) and Osterman

(2000) suggested that students' motivation, achievement and self worth were enhanced when they felt they belonged.

Further to this, research suggested that the experience of 'belonging' contributed to students' beliefs, attitudes, behaviour and performance (Osterman, 2000; Ryan, as cited in Osterman, 2000). Ryan (as cited in Osterman, 2000) argued that feelings of relatedness and connectedness were contributing factors for students developing a sense of autonomy which lead to a greater connection between students' actions and their personal goals. Additionally, Osterman (2000) suggested that when students felt connected with others in their environment, they were more likely to feel worthy, and this had the potential to lead to positive emotions, such as, happiness, elation, contentment, and calmness.

The sense of membership and/or belonging was enhanced when students felt respected, accepted, included and supported (Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000; Watkins, 2005). Further to this, Osterman (2000) suggested when students felt accepted, and the cultural climate of their classroom values encouraged supportive interaction, students were more likely to be supportive of others. This was reinforced by Nuthall (2007) who described the significance of peer interactions as part of a 'community'. He suggested that within the classroom or learning environment a certain amount of what students learnt, and how they learnt, was manifest within the peer culture of the classroom.

Critics who argued about the educational needs of students suggested that schools paid very little attention to the emotional and psychological needs and tended to focus on achievement and mastery over a sense of belonging (Kunc, 1992, as cited in Osterman, 2000; Osterman, 2000; Watkins, 2005). This view of education was described by Kunc (as cited in Osterman, 2000) as institutionalised beliefs and practices associated with schooling.

He suggested that institutionalised beliefs and practices implied that personal and social needs were expected to be met at home and it was intended that education associated with social relationships was met outside the classroom.

## **Teaching and learning**

It is also necessary to consider the discussion on how the concept of self worth has been linked to education, and how self worth related content has been implemented in schools in the past to the present day. Some aspects of quality teaching, effective teachers and pedagogical content knowledge was explored in relation to the development and enhancement of self worth within an educational context.

### **Self -worth in education/curriculum**

Developing and enhancing self worth could not be separated from the educational process (Beane, 1991; Goleman, 1995; Hipkins, 2005). Beane (1991) suggested that the issue was not whether schools should be enhancing self worth but how they should be enhancing self worth. Self worth was an important part of educational policy and thinking for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but it was in the 1980s that recognition of the strong links between self worth and achievement were made (Beane, 1991).

There have been significant issues within the educational system as to the way the development of self worth was approached in the past. Beane (1991) suggested that there have been both practical and conceptual issues associated with the idea surrounding ‘commoditisation of the self’ in the 1980s. Packaged programmes associated with building self worth were available to schools and were expected to be implemented in addition to the classroom programme. Beane (1991) was quoted to have said ‘if we are what we buy then perhaps we can also buy our way into self esteem/worth’ (p.27).

Isolated programme-based approaches to building self worth ignored the fact that the balance of interactions between the individual and the environment enhanced the growth and development of self worth (Beane, 1991; Hipkins, 2005). Self worth in the school system would be more effective if embedded into the culture of the school, and the nature in which curriculum is delivered in order for it to be effective (Beane, 1991; Goleman, 1995; Hipkins, 2005; Puurula *et al*, 2001).

Stout (2000) believed that approaches in schools to enhance self in the past had been detrimental. She described self worth, and programmes associated with self worth, as the ‘feel good curriculum’ suggesting that this emphasis on self worth had lead to a ‘dumbing down of American kids’ and compromised the overall level of academic achievement. While Stout (2000) presented a contrast, her reasons for this were similar to scholars mentioned above who had critiqued the implementation of self worth enhancing strategies and programmes. She reinforced her concerns with the following ten myths associated with building self worth.

1. High expectations for students are damaging to their self worth.
2. Evaluation (grading, testing, report cards) is punitive, stressful, and damaging to self worth.
3. Teaching and learning must always be relevant and student centred
4. Effort is more important than achievement.
5. Competition leads to low self worth and should be replaced with co operation.
6. Students should be promoted from one grade to the next irrespective of achievement (social promotion) in order to preserve their self worth.
7. Discipline is bad for self worth and should therefore be dispensed with.
8. Teachers should be therapists.
9. It is the teacher’s, not the student’s, responsibility to ensure learning.
10. Feeling is more important than thinking (pp 160 – 172).

Stout's concern was that practices associated with the development of self worth, such as the myths outlined above, were limiting. She suggested that these practices did not allow for intellectual and moral growth, and reinforced the individual to the point that the 'self' became fundamental to everything. Stout suggested concepts such as self esteem, self confidence and self worth should be underpinned by the individual's ability to:

- work on one's limitations and strengths
- take responsibility for one's actions
- identify a goal and take steps to achieve it
- acknowledge that while each person is unique they are also members of communities and it is that membership that gives meaning, structure, and purpose to their lives (p.280).

Marsh (2006) believed the process of enhancing self worth continued to be a concern and had been identified as a major focus in education. Self worth enhancement, along with self reliance and academic achievement, had been recognised and emphasised as major outcome goals within education (Marsh, 2006), and were consistent with what was reflected in the New Zealand education system (MOE, 2007).

Education in New Zealand was guided by ten National Education Goals, of which the first three reinforced approaches required to educate individuals to reach their full potential where a more encompassing view of education, including the development of self worth, was recognised. The three goals were:

1. The highest standards of achievement, through programmes which enable all students to realise their full potential as individuals, and to develop the values needed to become full members of New Zealand's society.
2. Equality of educational opportunity for all New Zealanders, by identifying and removing barriers to achievement.
3. Development of knowledge, understanding and skills needed by New Zealanders to compete successfully in the modern, ever-changing world (MOE, 2004).



Enhancing self worth is a valued part of the New Zealand education system (MOE, 2007). The need for young people to be confident, positive in their own identity and motivated was stated in the vision of the *NZC* (2007). Self worth was embedded into the key competencies of the *NZC* (2007) in the form of managing self which was described as ‘...self-motivation, a ‘can-do’ attitude, and with students seeing themselves as capable learners’ (p.12).

This ‘can-do’ attitude, and again the constructs associated with self worth, were explicitly evident within the structural framework of the Health and Physical Education Learning Area in the *NZC* (2007). Personal identity and self worth were the focus of the achievement objectives related to personal health and physical development and progress in complexity across the eight levels of the curriculum (Year 1 – Year 13).

Inherent however in the Health and Physical Education Learning Area in the *NZC* (2007) were four underlying concepts which provided for an holistic framework which personal identity and self worth were couched. This framework ensured the concept of ‘self’, including the development of self worth was underpinned by an holistic and educative philosophy. The four underlying concepts were as follows:

1. **Hauora**

A Māori philosophy of well-being which includes the dimensions of taha wairua (spiritual well being), taha hinengaro (emotional well being), taha tinana (physical well being), and taha whanau (social well being), each one influencing and supporting the others.

**2. Attitudes and values**

A positive, responsible attitude on the part of students to their own well-being; respect, care, and concern for other people and the environment; and a sense of social justice.

**3. Health promotion**

A process that helps to develop and maintain supportive physical and emotional environments in classrooms and that involves students in personal and collective action.

**4. The socio-ecological perspective**

A way of viewing and understanding the interrelationships that exist between the individual, others and society (p.22).

**Some views of self worth in the education system past and present**

A critique of historical approaches in education had been the narrow view of the purpose where intellect was valued over and above social and emotional. Abraham Maslow criticized the educational system stating:

*'...its chief concern was 'efficiency', where the purpose and emphasis on education was to implement the greatest number of facts into the greatest possible number of children, with minimum time, expense and effort. He believed education should not be extrinsic but 'intrinsic,' for the pleasure of knowing more of oneself and one's full potential as a human being' (as cited in Hofmann Nemiroff, 1992. p.34)*

John Dewey (1938), as a progressive educator, made similar critique of the education system over half a century ago. He too believed schools had the potential to be platforms for social reform, seeing education as an instrument for self realisation and schools as a site for people to learn how to adjust to the rapid changes taking place in their world (p.28). This was reinforced by Carl Rogers (as cited in Hofmann Nemiroff, 1992) who characterised the traditional classroom as a locus where only the intellect was valued, in which authoritarian rule was the accepted policy, with the teacher as powerful possessor of all the knowledge and the student as obedient recipient almost divorcing or forming a binary between the person and the learning. Rogers (cited in Hofmann Nemiroff, 1992) stated ‘there was no place for emotions in the traditional classroom. Teacher-student and student-student trust was at a minimum in such a repressive environment’ (p.36).

This approach was underpinned by the view that the teacher was the expert and where it was believed that the teacher holds the knowledge that is given to students. This view was contradictory to contemporary views of how students gain knowledge (Gilbert, 2005; Hipkins, 2005; Hofmann Nemiroff , 1992; Nuthall, 2007). Hofmann Nemiroff (1992) suggested education should be people-centred and process-centred, rather than simply information-centred. She stated:

*‘True education should evolve from self perceived needs of the students, and it should develop from an understanding of why they wanted to learn certain things, why certain types of knowledge might be important for them personally, rather than simply as a means to another and distant end, such as institutional prerequisites, or some distant privilege that might accrue to the holder of specific and privileged knowledge’ (p.27).*

Critique however was that in a classroom/school environment the learners’ attention becomes focused on what must be done to complete the activities (the product) rather than on the required skills and overall educational process (Brophy, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 2001).

This enhanced the competitive nature of the learning environment which could lead to avoidance strategies used by less able students to limit failure and protect self worth (Brophy, 2004; Lawrence, 1988; Purkey, 1970; Siefert, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 2001).

If the learning environment had the potential to be the place where young people learnt how to learn as opposed to learning how to *avoid* learning, elements such as change, learning, knowledge construction and relationships were recognised as important. Gilbert (2005) acknowledged that much of the current educational literature emphasised the learning of skills, life-long learning and learning how to learn. She reinforced the need to re-think learning and the way knowledge is constructed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. She suggested that new ways of organising education should not be based on the 'one size fits all' production-line model, but a model that allowed for flexibility, multiplicity and new ideas about ability. She acknowledged the need to recognise the changes that underpin education, the educational learning environment, the learners and their purpose for learning (Gilbert, 2005; Hofmann Nemiroff, 1992). Gilbert (2005) emphasised the need to focus on quality teaching that meets the needs of students in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Quality teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Quality Teaching for Diverse Students in Schooling: Best Evidence Synthesis (BES, 2003) was an example of research into best practise for quality teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in New Zealand. This research was commissioned by the MOE with the purpose of committing to, and strengthening the evidence base that informs education policy and practice in New Zealand. In a synthesis of research findings, associated with the BES (2003), ten characteristics of quality teaching were identified. They are as follows:

1. Quality teaching is focused on student achievement (including social outcomes) and facilitates high standards of student outcomes for heterogeneous groups of students.
2. Pedagogical practices enable classes and other learning groupings to work as caring, inclusive, and cohesive learning communities.

3. Effective links are created between school and other cultural contexts in which students are socialised, to facilitate learning.
4. Quality teaching is responsive to student learning processes.
5. Opportunity to learn is effective and sufficient.
6. Multiple task contexts support learning cycles.
7. Curriculum goals, resources are effectively aligned (including ICT usage, task design, teaching and school practices).
8. Pedagogy scaffolds and provides appropriate feedback on students' task engagement.
9. Pedagogy promotes learning orientations, student self-regulation, meta-cognitive strategies and thoughtful student discourse.
10. Teachers and students engage constructively in goal-orientated assessment (pp. 6 – 10).

Quality teaching was identified as a key influence on high quality outcomes for diverse students. The evidence revealed that up to 59% of variance in student performance was attributable to differences between teachers and classes, whilst up to 21% was attributable to school level variables (BES, 2003). The nature of quality teaching could be reinforced by the New Zealand Graduating Teacher Standards (MOE, 2007). There was an expectation that teachers graduating from pre-service institutions within New Zealand should have the following standards, which they were expected to maintain:

- Professional knowledge inclusive of knowledge of what to teach, knowledge about learners and an understanding about contextual factors.
- Professional practice related to teacher planning and the use of evidence to promote learning
- Professional values and relationships including the ability to develop positive relationships with learners and members of the community, and being a committed member of the profession (p.1).

There were similarities with the findings from a national focus in the USA where the emphasis had been on developing attributes of excellent teachers. This had however

resulted in tighter curricula specifications, prescribed text books, bounded structures of classrooms, scripts of the teaching act, and all this underpinned by a structure of accountability, including a national testing system to ensure teachers teach the right material and use the right teaching activities to maximise achievement.

In Hattie's (2003) search to ascertain the attributes of excellence he suggested that we should be trying to find the major source of variance in students' achievement and concentrate on these sources of variance to truly make a difference. His concern was that many of these studies related to the qualities of effective teachers were based on simple analysis of single variables, small numbers of teachers, and teachers who had not already been identified as expert.

### **Effective teachers and pedagogical content knowledge**

Literature suggested effective teachers knew how to teach in ways that made sense to their students (Alton-Lee, 2003; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Shulman, 1987). Shulman (1987) used the term pedagogical content knowledge to describe the 'what' and 'how' of teaching. He defined pedagogical knowledge as 'the blending of content and pedagogy into an understanding of how particular topics, problems, or issues were organised, represented, and adapted to the diverse interests and abilities of learners, and presented for instruction' (p.8)

This was reinforced by McGee and Fraser (2008) who, while acknowledging the importance of content knowledge, stressed the significance of pedagogical knowledge. Similarly, Jones and Morland (2003) reinforced the culmination of content and pedagogical knowledge summarising pedagogical content knowledge as:

*'A complex blending of pedagogy and subject content and includes aspects related to an understanding of what is to be taught, learned and assessed, an understanding of how learners learn, and understanding of ways to facilitate effective learning, and an*

*understanding of how to blend content and pedagogy to organised particular topics for learners.’ (p. 81).*

McGee and Fraser (2008) described teaching as ‘a skilled science and a truly creative art’ (p.52) suggesting that teachers made informed and creative decisions when striving to engage their students in learning. There was no set formula for what worked in classrooms with different groups of students, however McGee and Fraser (2008) believed that teachers required a repertoire of pedagogical strategies to ensure they met the needs of student diversity and had the potential to enhance self worth.

Cohen (1999) and Elias (2003) believed that implementing social and emotional learning strategies in schools was an effective pedagogical approach to enhancing self worth. This was reinforced by Adelman and Taylor (as cited in Zins *et al*, 2004) who discussed the need for schools to focus on more than academic instruction and school management in their efforts to help students attain academic success. Packer & Goicoechea (as cited in Hipkins, 2005) argued further with a humanistic perspective on the real purpose of schools being the ‘production of people’. Social and emotional learning theory was built on an understanding of the interaction that occurred between an individual and their environment. Elias (1997) stated ‘Social and emotional learning is the process through which we learn to recognise and manage emotions, care about others, make good decisions, behave ethically and responsibly, develop positive relationships, and avoid negative behaviours’ (p.184).

Crocker and Park (as cited in McLeary & Tangrey, 2003) and Siefert (2004) described the significance of ‘goal theory’ as a pedagogical strategy which had the potential to enhance self worth and motivation to learn. Siefert (2004) states ‘the premise of goal theory is that students’ behaviours are a function of desires to achieve particular goals’ (p.142). Distinction has been made between performance goals and learning goals suggesting students pursuing performance goals, believed that effort was the cause of success or failure. Students pursuing performance goals were more likely to be concerned with how well they performed and how others perceive them as a result of their performance while students pursuing learning goals reacted quite differently,

seeing tasks as learning orientated and could respond to these tasks as challenges to be overcome (Crocker & Park, as cited in McLeary & Tangrey, 2003; Siefert, 2004).

Cooperative learning and bonding activities had the potential to enhance relationships and overall feelings of belonging amongst students, therefore increasing the sense of self worth (Johnson, Lutzow, Strothoff, & Zannis as cited in Osterman 2000; Osterman, 2000). Johnson *et al* (as cited in Osterman, 2000) suggested that through pedagogies such as cooperative learning opportunities students:

- exhibit a higher level of comfort and satisfaction
- demonstrate a greater ability to make friends easily and naturally
- are able to express their ideas and feelings more openly
- can make mistakes in groups without worrying about being put down (p.337).

Similarly, Nuthall (2007) advocated for teaching approaches that allowed students to self-select and/or self-generate their own learning experiences and that provided more opportunity for students to manage their own learning. This was supported by Phillips (2000) who believed constructivist pedagogical approaches provided a student-centred framework for teaching and learning based on two main premises:

1. Instruction must take as its starting point the knowledge, attitudes, and interests students bring to the learning situation.
2. Instruction must be designed so as to provide experiences that effectively interact with these characteristics of students so that they may construct their own understanding (p.31).

Constructivist teaching and learning approaches were in contrast to the teacher-centred behaviourist approaches of traditional schooling. Constructivist teaching and learning approaches allowed students more input into the learning process and had been described as emancipatory in nature. This appeared to influence self perceptions and had a positive effect on overall self worth (Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000).



This was supported by McGee and Fraser (2008) who suggested that greater student input and responsibility allowed students to gain deeper understanding of their beliefs, capabilities and confidence to improve. The relationship between the constructivist's approaches to teaching and learning and self worth was also connected to what Ormrod (2008) described as contextual learning where the confidence and competence a student brought to a particular context of learning enhanced future learning experiences.

Constructivist pedagogy catered for diversity and allowed for learners to build on their own experiences, and progress at their own speed (Kolb, 1983; Mosston, 1986; Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000). An example of constructivist pedagogy was Mosston's (1986) landmark spectrum of teaching styles, which outlined a continuum of teacher-centred to learner-centred styles of teaching. This spectrum was underpinned by the construct of decision making and the various levels of decision making for teachers or students within a variety of teaching styles (Mosston, 1986). The spectrum was a 'reproduction/production' approach to learning, suggesting that the more decision making made by students the more chance of a construction and production of new knowledge as opposed to reproducing knowledge that had been given to them by their teachers. The variety of pedagogical approaches across the spectrum provided for the development and enhancement of self worth through the cognitive, social, emotional and physical dimensions of learning, and the development of moral/ethical human attributes. Constructivist models of teaching were characterised by teaching methods and strategies such as problem solving, experimentation, questioning and critical thinking, which require greater student input (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007).

It was recognised however in contemporary literature that many students (and some adults) had little understanding of effective thinking and learning strategies (Ormrod, 2008). This brought rise to the importance of implementing pedagogical practices that allowed the student to learn and develop meta-cognitive strategies to enhance not only their learning, but their learning experiences. Nuthall (2007) described a process called ‘meta cognitive monitoring’ where students’ judgements about how their own mind worked was examined with the view to this contributing to the way they thought about new experiences. He suggested the following knowledge and skills that relate to meta-cognition:

- Being aware of own learning and memory capabilities.
  - Knowing which learning strategies are effective.
  - Planning effective learning approaches.
  - Using effective learning strategies.
  - Monitoring own present knowledge.
  - Knowing effective strategies for retrieving previously stored information
- (adapted from Ormrod, 2008, p. 352)

Brookfield’s (1995) view, associated with critical reflection, was consistent with these constructivist approaches in teaching and learning. Brookfield (1995) suggested the need for teachers to develop more critically reflective practice. This was reinforced by Ronholt (2002) who suggested that learning could not be determined by the teachers’ thinking and planning alone, in recognition that learning is constructed and influenced by socio-cultural discourses embodied in a particular situation (p.34).

Brookfield (1995) suggested critical reflection allowed teachers to address common beliefs about the world and the place of people within it, in this case the classroom, the students and the development of self worth. He suggested that critical reflection encouraged people to think at higher levels, understand a particular situation from different perspectives and challenge existing assumptions that influence actions.

Critical reflection was recognised, for this reason, as an emancipatory process whereby people could come to understand their existence from a critical perspective (Brookfield, 1995; Fisher, 2003). Fisher (2003) stated that ‘critical reflection added moral and ethical criteria such as equity and justice, locating analysis of personal action within wider historical, political and social contexts’ (p.314). Critical reflection was recognised by the Alton-Lee (2003) in the Best Evidence Synthesis as effective pedagogical practice in the development of successful communities of learning.

Moltzen (as cited in NZQA, 2005) made connections between inspirational teaching and intrinsic motivation. He believed in inspiring his students, not to become disciples but to bring new ideas or approaches to the field. He stated;

*‘I try to capture the interest of my students in such a way that they attend classes because they see value in what is being taught. In other words I want to increase their levels of intrinsic motivation. The challenge here is not to compromise academic rigour or integrity in an effort to make content interesting and stimulating. My aim is to do justice to both.’* (p.11).

Moltzen (as cited in NZQA, 2005) provided opportunities for students to develop understandings and ideas and in doing so their own beliefs and feelings associated with these ideas. He challenged their ability to question and perhaps disagree giving them some ownership of their learning and in doing so enhancing the sense of ‘self’ and strengthening the professional connections he was forming with his students. A criticism however was that the social climate of the classroom learning environment was a microcosm of extrinsic interactions which had the potential to impact negatively on motivation (Brophy, 2004).

Brophy (2004) identified limiting factors of the general classroom/school setting such as:

- Compulsory school attendance
- Curriculum content selected on the basis of what society believes students need to learn rather than on the basis of what students would choose if given the opportunity to do so
- Large classes and inability to meet individual needs
- Classrooms as social settings, so failures produce not only individual disappointment but public embarrassment
- Assignments and performance on tests are graded (p.13).

## **Summary**

This chapter provided a review that drew on both educational and psychological literature relating to self worth. It was clear that a number of terms have some connection to self worth but it was Siefert's definition of self worth outlined in the literature review that underpinned this study. This literature review drew on some historical and contemporary concepts with the view to outlining the development of the self esteem/self worth movement in schools, past and present. The importance of the psychological self was examined in relation to achievement, along with the self in relation to the socio-cultural climate of the classroom learning environment.

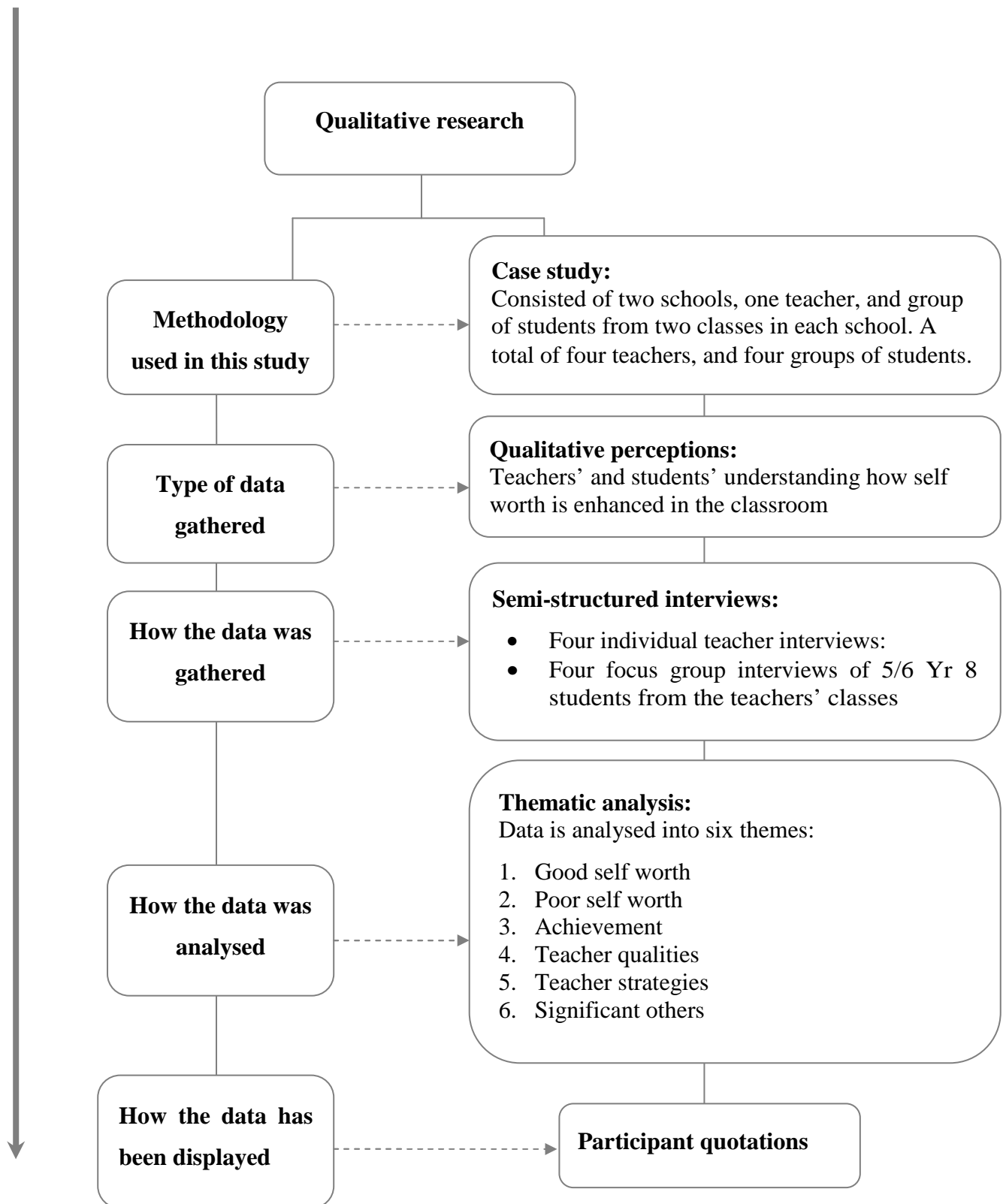
## **Chapter Three: Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter describes the methodology employed in this study in relation to the research questions. It is structured so that the research design and the methodology are made explicit and are accompanied with some description as to why particular methodological approaches were chosen. Limitations of the research design and methodology are explored throughout the discussion, and an overriding statement is made in relation to limitations and researcher presence and bias. This is followed by an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study.

### **Overview of research methodology**

The research methodology used is summarised in Figure 2.

**Figure 2: Outline of methodological process**



(Adapted from Mutch, 2005, p.48)

## **Qualitative research design**

On settling on the research questions for this study it was clear that a qualitative methodological approach was necessary to ensure the data collection was both rich and descriptive (Thomas & Nelson, 1996). It was also clear that in attempting to obtain and describe data about participants' understandings and perceptions, within a real life context, qualitative approaches were well suited (Mutch, 2005; Neuman, 1997 & Thomas & Nelson, 1996; Willis, 2005). Qualitative research design provided a suitable framework for examining perceptions and understandings of how self worth was influenced in the learning environment, and for identifying the similarities and differences in teachers' and students' understanding.

## **Case study**

Consistent with qualitative research is the case study approach. Yin (2009) suggested that it could be the nature of the research questions that determined the choice of methodology, and how and why questions could lead to the use of case studies. Case study is used to gain understanding about a particular phenomena (Stake, 2005). It is a valued methodological approach because it allows the researcher to focus on deeper and more complex aspects of a single event or concept. A case study could be described as a single instance of a bounded system, where a bounded system in this context means a clique, a class, a school or a person, setting or concept (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Mutch, 2005; Stake, 2005). However, it is important to recognise that a case could be either simple or complex (Stake as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and the purpose for choosing a case study methodology should be clear. Yin (2009) described three approaches when designing a case study; exploratory, explanatory and descriptive. Stake (2000) suggested that the intrinsic and instrumental interest could help with the selection of the case where the researcher decides whether the study has been undertaken for its intrinsic worth, or whether the purpose of the case was to provide a supportive role. Additionally, Yin (2009) suggested that it could be the nature of the research questions that determined whether the case is intrinsic or extrinsic.

It was of interest in this study how a defined group of four teachers and four focus groups of students perceived the concept of self worth to be influenced in the learning environment. In considering the literature that suggested the case and/or research questions determined the case (Gillham, 2000; Stake, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Willis, 2007, Yin, 2009) a descriptive case study was chosen in line with Yin (2009). A single case study as opposed to multiple case study was defined considering the participants from two schools were there to enrich the data as opposed to making a comparison.

## **Selection of participants**

Two schools located in different socio-economic areas were purposefully selected, by the researcher, for this study. Initial contact was made with the school principals through a formal letter (see Appendix 2). Four teachers (two from each school) were selected by the principal to take part in the study. It is important to acknowledge that in case studies, there is always a selection bias due to small numbers of participants, and this bias has the potential to distort the data gathered and to influence findings (Thomas, 2009). In acknowledging this, participants were purposively selected based on their experience in the classroom and availability to participate. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) suggest purposive sampling allows the researcher to handpick their sample based on their judgement of typicality of the particular sample population. It was important that these teachers had a reasonable amount of classroom experience to provide the rich and detailed response required for contributing to the research question (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Thomas, 2009). This purposive sample ensured that the teachers selected demonstrated characteristics of 'well rounded' classroom teachers (Mutch, 2005). This bias has been accepted as a limitation of this study. Four teachers and four focus groups of 4 – 5 of their year 8 students were selected as a bounded case. This provided rich data whilst still retaining a reasonable data collection size.



Participant information is outlined below, with the associated coding to protect anonymity in line with ethical considerations.

- T1** Experienced primary school teacher of approximately 15 years. She is currently teaching in a year 7/8 class in a medium sized, decile 3 primary school.
- T2** Teaching approximately four years and currently teaching in a yr 7/8 class in a large, decile 9 primary school. He has responsibility for sport in the school.
- T3** Experienced primary school teacher of approximately 20 years currently teaching in a year 8 class. She has a leadership responsibility of coordinating the year 7/8 syndicate in a large, decile 9 primary school.
- T4** Experienced primary school teacher of approximately 15 years currently teaching in a year 7/8 class. She has a leadership responsibility of coordinating the year 7/8 syndicate in a medium sized, decile 3 primary school.

The professional role of the researcher as a lecturer was considered when approaching participants to be part of the study. This could have put teachers in the awkward position of feeling like they should participate when they wanted to decline. In considering this teachers were first approached by their school principals in an attempt to reduce any pressure relating to initial acceptance of the invitation to participate in the study. Once teachers had agreed first contact was made from the researcher by phone. During this phone call participants were thanked for agreeing to participate and advised that information packs would be sent to them. The information pack contained the study information letter (Appendix 3), consent forms (Appendix 4), and ethical clearance approval. Participants were asked to sign and return the consent forms; a stamped envelope was included.

A student focus group from each teacher's class was randomly selected by the principal using the class roll. Mutch (2005) suggested that the random sample ensured that each student had the same chance of being selected for the study and eliminated any potential for bias. However, focus group composition/random sampling was checked by the principal, and modified if deemed necessary, to ensure disruptive students behaviour did not limit the researcher from obtaining open and honest data. Names were forwarded to the researcher and students were invited to participate in the study through information letters (see Appendices 3, 5 and 7) sent to the school for distribution. Teacher, and parental consent for students, was obtained before the research proceeded (see Appendices 4 and 6).

## **Data collection**

Multiple forms of data collection were required with the view to collecting and examining rich and descriptive data (Creswell, 2005; Willis, 2007). Data was collected from both teachers and students with the view to cross examining understandings associated with self worth. Three of the four teachers were interviewed in their classroom where they could refer to resources that related to the interview questions, such as teaching material and wall displays. This provided an opportunity for the researcher to connect what teachers were saying to the resources they used to underpin self worth enhancing strategies in the classroom. This provided further depth and detail to the data collected from the participants' interviews, and provided credibility to the data (Mutch, 2005; Faenkel & Wallen, 2009). On reflection, it would have been beneficial to observe teachers and students in general classroom practice as a method of triangulation for the further credibility of the data.

On completion of consent forms and demographic survey, interview times were arranged with the classroom teachers involved. Data was collected by interviewing teachers individually, and students in small focus groups using semi-structured interviewing techniques.

## **Interviews**

Two types of face-to-face interviews were carried out:

1. Individual with teachers
2. Focus groups with students

Face-to-face interviews with teachers were approximately 45 minutes in duration, and were conducted in the school premises where teachers felt comfortable. A dictaphone was used to accurately record perspectives and comments in each interview. The advantage of face-to-face interviews was that the interviewer also had the ability to gauge the atmosphere and see the non-verbal communication (Neuman, 1997) as facial expression and body language could have contributed to the researcher's interpretation of the responses.

Focus group interviews were used with students as opposed to individual interviews because it allowed for participants to interact with each other and for their collective views to emerge naturally through interaction (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) emphasise the importance of group size suggesting groups need to be small enough to be easily managed but large enough to operate effectively if a member does not turn up. Morgan (as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 377) suggests optimal focus group numbers to be between 4 – 12 participants. Focus groups for this study were based on 4 – 5 students per group to ensure there were enough students if someone was away and to ensure the group did not get too large for this particular age group (year 8 students, 12/13 years old). Language was altered when required considering the age of the students and some questions were redirected or probe questions were used to provide all group members with a chance to speak (Williams, 2003). Some students tended to dominate and as Williams (2003) suggested this was a gamble with focus group interviewing as while the use of redirection or probe questions could be used to engage individuals it tended to limit the amount of group interaction intended from focus group interviewing.

Interviews were semi-structured making use of open-ended questioning techniques that allowed participants to answer in detail and qualify and clarify responses when necessary. This method was consistent with the case study approach where it was intended to draw rich and descriptive data, as suggested earlier, from participants. Burns (1997) described the need for semi-structured interviewing techniques when investigating beliefs, feelings or perceptions as they allow the researcher and participants the scope for elaboration that is not possible in pre-ordained response categories or structured interviewing techniques. The semi-structured interviewing guidelines were piloted and revised prior to using them in the research (Bogden & Biklen, 2007). This ensured the questions were developmentally appropriate for the students and were going to elicit the right kind of information from the students in an attempt to answer the research questions (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Yin 2009). While the interviews were semi-structured and did not require an interview schedule the areas for discussion guided by some more general questions were listed. Mutch (2005) described this as an interview guide and suggested that this guide could also include starter, prompt, probe and follow up questions. The interview guides including the general questions or areas for discussion are as follows:

#### **Teachers semi-structured interview guide**

1. Describe characteristics of students who you believe have good self worth?
2. Describe characteristics of students who you believe have poor self worth?
3. What impacts on a student's sense of self worth in the learning environment?

##### **Probing questions:**

- Do you think levels of self worth can vary?
  - Where do you think self worth is influenced most? School or home?
4. What do you do as a teacher to enhance self worth in the classroom?

Probing questions:

- Is self worth something you explicitly plan to teach about?
- If I was to ask student you have taught in the past how you as a teacher enhance self worth what do you think they would say?

5. How do you think good self worth impacts on a student's ability to learn?

Probing questions:

- How high would you rate the importance of good self worth to learning on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the least important; 5 being the highest)
- In your experience have you seen levels of self worth change or vary depending on what the students are doing?

6. How do you think poor self worth impacts on a student's ability to learn?

**Students semi-structured interview guide**

1. Describe the characteristics of a person who feels good about themselves (has good self worth)
2. Describe the characteristics of a person who does not feel good about themselves (has poor self worth)
3. What are the things that you think make a person feel good about themselves?

Probing question:

- What are the things that make you feel good about yourself?

4. What are the things that you think don't make a person feel good about themselves?

Probing question:

- What are the things that don't make you feel good about yourself?

5. Are there people in your lives who have made you feel good about yourselves?  
Why have they made you feel good about yourselves?
6. What do teachers do to enhance the way you feel about yourselves (self worth)?
7. When people feel good about themselves how do you think it changes the way they learn at school?

Probing questions:

- Can you feel good about yourself while doing something but not so good about yourself when doing something else?
  - Do you think levels of self worth can change?
  - Do you think self worth or feeling good about yourself is important when learning?
8. When people don't feel good about themselves how do you think it changes the way they learn at school?

In both the individual teacher and student focus group interviews, semi-structured interviewing techniques provided rich and detailed data. However, it was clear in reviewing the transcripts that more experience with qualitative research techniques would have helped the researcher further develop threads of conversation. Follow-up interviews, exploring some of the emerging threads in more detail, may have provided additional information. Both students and teachers were asked Research Questions 1 and 2 as outlined in Chapter 1.

During the interview phase the following measures were taken to ensure the protection of both the researcher and of the participants during the data collection phase of this study

- Pilot interviews were conducted with student focus groups to practise group discussion and allow students to feel more at ease with the researcher. This

allowed participants and the interviewer to feel more comfortable, understand ground rules and should allow the research session to run more efficiently (Oppenheim, as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). The pilot interviews were shorter in duration and were based on a topic suggested by the students. This ensured that students did not feel like they were being dominated by the researcher. Important to consider was the interviewer participant relationship. With a university lecturer as researcher/interviewer it was important to recognise the possible power relationship between interviewees and researcher/interviewer (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

- The safety features of focus group interviewing were outlined to students. The ethical aspects of confidentiality were discussed and students were asked to agree that everything said in the interview/discussion must stay inside the room (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It was outlined to students that if discussion raised something they felt uncomfortable about or wished to discuss further, they could talk to their parents/guardians, researcher, teachers or principal. Semi-structured sessions with a number of prompt and probe questions were included to ensure students felt comfortable in conversation and did not feel like they had been put on the spot at any time (Williams, 2003).
- The interviews were audio-taped with the option of being turned off at any time during the interview at the participant's request. The audio-tapes and transcripts were stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed on completion of the research (Williams, 2003).
- Copies of the interviews were provided for the participants if requested.
- Participants' names were known only to the researcher and confidentiality was maintained by replacing the names with codes. The codes were used throughout the research and the list linking the students to the code number was stored in a locked cabinet and destroyed on completion of the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

## **Data analysis**

Data was transcribed and examined for emerging themes which were consequently organised into categories. This approach of analysing data has been described as thematic analysis (Mutch, 2005). Mutch (2005) suggested that thematic analysis allowed the researcher to approach the text (data) with an open mind, uncover the key messages, look at how words were used and identify important themes. Silverman (2006) suggested that the term qualitative content analysis could be used to describe thematic analyses and sometimes discourse analysis (p. 163) suggesting similarities in these strategies. Mutch (2005) suggested however that thematic analysis established themes from the data unlike content analysis in which research could begin with pre-determined themes/categories. Thematic analysis was recognised as a reliable and/or credible framework for analysing qualitative data as it allowed the researcher to reduce what was sometimes a large amount of data, to key elements or themes while maintaining the quality of the data (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

Transcripts were read, then re-read and commonalities were highlighted as potential themes. Transcripts were then analysed in more depth and a coding system was used to confirm the emerging themes. These were then collated into larger categories. Mutch (2005) suggested an eight point process for thematic analysis:

1. Browse
2. Highlight
3. Code
4. Group and label
5. Develop themes or categories
6. Check for consistency and resonance
7. Select examples
8. Report findings

(Mutch, 2005, pp.131 – 132)



This form of thematic analysis was described by LeCompte & Preissel (as cited in Mutch, 2005) as constant comparative analysis that involved a series of steps related to perceiving, comparing, contrasting, aggregating, ordering, establishing linkages and relationships and speculating about data to establish themes.

A highlighter, 'post it' notes and a coding system using key words was used to identify the emerging themes. The use of mind mapping (see appendix 8) assisted with making sense of the data and to ensure the analysis would answer the research questions. Williams (2003) suggested that researchers often made use of various strategies to record the analysis of data such as journals and diagrams. While this manual process allowed for immersion in the data there was also the concern with this approach that data could be missed or misinterpreted. There were many times where data could have been interpreted a number of ways and could have been situated within more than one of the themes identified but peer checking and monitoring helped.

On completion of the data analysis phase appropriate themes were identified but as the research process continued into the discussion phase further analysis was necessary. It was during the discussion that the data was merged into six larger more accommodating themes that directly related to the research questions. This will be discussed in more detail in the following section on writing. The qualitative research process is such that analysis is always evolving and because it is as Willis (2007) suggested, subjective and reliant on the researcher and researcher's decisions. The understanding of the emerging research grew as the study progressed. The unpredictable and somewhat messy nature of qualitative research meant that the researcher was always in a state of reflection, formulating and reformulating perceptions, beliefs and research practices throughout the research process (Willis, 2007). This allowed for negotiation of the evolving terrain and the shaping and moulding of the research.

## **Writing**

The approaches to the various writing phases of the research process required some consideration as each, although linked, had a different purpose and/or contribution to

make (Biggam, 2008; Thomas & Brubaker, 2008). Constructing a clear and succinct literature review required thorough planning to ensure it did not evolve into something larger than the scale of the study. Managing the volume of the literature was a challenge, the more reading, the greater the potential scope of the study. Sub-sections within the literature review were created as suggested by Biggam (2008) in an attempt to contain the literature to the main research topic. The literature review in essence was scene setting, examining academic findings in relation to self worth in the past, exploring emerging themes and identifying the relevance of these studies in relation to mine (Biggam, 2008). The initial literature review provided an overview of what appeared to be relevant, but it soon became clear that this would to develop as the study progressed (Biggam, 2008; Thomas & Brubaker, 2008).

While the findings section in this study was essentially descriptive, the discussion provided yet another form of analysis. Mutch (2005) suggests the purpose of the discussion is to provide the ‘so what’ of the study. At this point it was time to consider what was important in the findings, what really mattered and what was of interest in relation to the data and lead to the first of many drafts. With the view to ensuring discussion reflected the results of the study, a coherent flow between the findings and discussion chapters was necessary. On completion of the first draft, further analysis was required. Theme cards, titled with the themes identified in the first analysis, were attached across the top of a whiteboard. Concept cards were generated; these cards could be moved between themes as a mapping process. The concept cards included all concepts and ideas identified during the data analysis phase. This provided a visual representation of the themes and helped organise and cluster ideas with the intention of further defining the structure of the discussion.

## **Ethical implications**

Ethical considerations were recognised as an important part of research. They were outlined here as a separate section but recognised as an inherent part of this study. This study proceeded with approval by the University of Canterbury College of Education Academic Standards and Ethical Approval Committees. As part of the process, research

participants were advised in writing, and verbally, of the University of Canterbury complaints procedure should issues arise during the study. The social nature of the focus group interviews and the age of the students made for extra consideration to the way these interviews were pre-conceived and conducted. These considerations have been described in more detail in particular relation to the students' focus group interviews earlier in the interview section.

The reader needs to be sure they can trust the design and decisions made in the research (Mutch, 2005). Mutch (2005) suggested that in quantitative design this assurance could be reinforced through reliability and validity and in qualitative design it was terms such as trustworthiness and credibility that were important. There were however varying views on reliability and validity in both quantitative and qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009; Golafshani, 2003). For the purpose of this qualitative study aspects of reliability and validity have been described using the terms trustworthiness, credibility and integrity as suggested by Mutch (2005).

### **Trustworthiness**

The open ended nature of qualitative research means that it is difficult to replicate the study and obtain similar results (Mutch, 2005). The purpose of this study was to gather information about how self worth was enhanced in the learning environment from this particular group of people. While it was not the intention of this research to be able to generalise this information it was important that this information was sought in a manner that was trustworthy and believable to the reader (Mutch, 2005). An ethical approach to the design process, data gathering and data analysis was undertaken in this study and has been outlined throughout the methodology section.

### **Credibility and integrity**

Enhancing credibility and integrity ensured that the researcher's interpretations of the data were consistent with the meaning intended by the participants (Creswell, 2005; Mutch, 2005). A threat to qualitative studies is that the researcher can enter the research

with pre-conceived ideas. These ideas can influence the research design, in particular the data collection and analysing phases. The thematic analysis of data was viewed by more than one researcher to ensure credibility and integrity of data analysed. This is consistent with Silverman (2006) who suggested the reliability/credibility/integrity of data could be improved by comparing the analysis of data from several researchers. This process could have been further enhanced by returning interview transcripts to participants for viewing before analysis (Mutch, 2005).

## **Researcher interest**

The investigation of how self worth was influenced in the learning environment was of interest to me in my professional role as a primary school teacher, and now as a teacher educator. I believe in education of the ‘whole child’. I see a dualism between social and emotional aspects of teaching and learning and academic achievement and recognise both to have equal importance. The socio-critical humanistic positioning underpinning the *NZC* (2007) provides a platform and, if implemented with understanding, has the potential of meeting the holistic needs of students in New Zealand schools. As a lecturer in primary teacher education at the University of Canterbury I am strongly committed to developing understanding of quality teaching and learning with specific relevance to educating the ‘whole child’ and enhancing self worth.

## **Researcher presence and bias**

As a qualitative researcher it is important to consider my presence and bias on and in relation to this study. Researcher presence is always an explicit issue (Neuman, 1997, p.334) and needs to be acknowledged. Outlining personal views and including bias and potential subjectivities allows readers to take these into account when reading the dissertation (Bogden & Biklen, 2007).

I believe that self worth plays an important part in the teaching and learning process for students as learners at school and in developing necessary skills for lifelong learning.

Quality teaching, underpinned with a humanistic view that places the learner at the centre of learning, has the potential of promoting achievement related attitudes and behaviours towards learning inclusive of improved self worth. The *NZC* (2007) has the potential, if understood and implemented authentically by teachers, of enhancing self worth by meeting the holistic needs of students in schools. In acknowledging my biases it is not surprising that I began this study believing that social, emotional and ethical learning related experiences had the potential of enhancing self worth and the humanistic underpinning of people-centred teaching and learning approaches would be more likely to enhance self worth.

My presence and positioning may have biased the interpretation and analysis of data, and writing of this dissertation, and I acknowledge this. Reflecting on the bias in and throughout the process of writing this dissertation allowed me to ensure I was making every attempt to consider my presence as a researcher and the consequent affect of my presence and bias on the research process.

## **Theoretical framework**

The research framework underpinning this study is the interpretive paradigm (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Willis, 2007) with a theoretical emphasis on humanism and socio-critical humanism (Carr & Kremmis, 1986; Farmer, 2001; McInerney, 2005; McInerney & McInerney, 2006).

### **Interpretive paradigm**

The examination of self worth and learning was positioned within the interpretive paradigm by the contextual nature of the topic. The purpose of the interpretive paradigm is to analyse how individuals behave in a social context. It allows for the interpretation and subjectivity of interests, attitudes and values that can be explored through the individuals' social reality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Willis, 2007). The interpretive approach is underpinned with the belief that known reality is socially constructed (Willis, 2007). According to Williams (2003) researching from an

interpretive perspective or paradigm provides a means for learning about social life in context and seeks to understand the meaning people have for their actions and behaviours within a social context. Additionally Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested that most qualitative researchers see their studies not as truth but as an interpretation of a particular reality associated with the human condition. The interpretive paradigm allows for exploration of the research questions and the opportunity to construct an interpretive account of lived experiences.

While the emphasis of research related to self worth has varied over time, the last two to three decades have brought about a re-emergence of educational and psychological studies related to self worth. Studies of self worth in the 1970s to mid 1990s were challenged because their research design was perceived to be weak and there was a lack of consistent findings (Hattie, 1992; Shavelson, *et al*, 1976). An overview of self worth related research suggests much of it was designed around the positivist paradigm using quantitative methodologies to measure and quantify self worth.

Marsh (2006) suggested that contemporary studies in education and psychology, in the modern era, have made importance advances in theory, measurement, research and practice. Marsh (2006) acknowledged Shavelson *et al* (1976) whose interpretive research approach which was underpinned by qualitative methodology and recognised the need to acknowledge the multifaceted structure of self concept (worth). Marsh (2006) suggested that self worth could not be adequately understood if its multidimensionality was ignored thus reinforcing the need for qualitative research methodologies.

A limitation of the interpretive paradigm was its tendency to ignore the power relationships within which people operate (Carr & Kremmis, 1986; Sparks, 1996). Carr and Kremmis (1986) recognised this limitation suggesting studies had the potential to be distorted and incomplete because they did not take the social influence of inequalities into account. Hargreaves (as cited in Sparks, 1996) described this using the term 'splendid isolation' suggesting 'students, groups and classrooms were taken to exist in a social and cultural vacuum that was not touched by economic demands, political

pressures and social influences of the wider community' (p.39). Sharp (as cited in Sparks 1996) supported Hargreaves' (as cited in Sparks, 1996) views arguing 'there was not enough attention given to the underlying nature of structural patterns of social relationships that pre-exist the individual and generate specific forms of social consciousness' (p.48).

Carr and Kremmis (1986) acknowledged the need, more than 20 years ago, for a more critical focus when examining the effect of relationships in the learning environment. They suggested that social reality was not only structured by concepts and ideas but was underpinned by oppressive conditions which had the potential to influence interpretations of reality. Carr and Kremmis (1986) suggested that uncovering these structures and processes is a vital requirement that is neglected by the interpretive approach. A critical focus for this study will be examined through the concept of socio-critical humanism.

### **Humanism and socio-critical humanism**

Humanism provided a philosophical framework for this study that recognised self worth as part of the all round growth and development of the 'whole child' (Farmer, 2001) and provided a means for investigating the social and emotional characteristics of human behaviour within the socio-cultural learning environment (McInerney, 2005; McInerney & McInerney, 2006). Humanism is underpinned by an interest in how individuals acquire emotions, attitudes, values and interpersonal skills within a social context (Ormrod, 2008). A humanist perspective reinforces the development of self knowledge with the view to maximising human potential and recognises how the conscious understanding of internal thoughts and feelings is essential in understanding learning behaviour (McInerney & McInerney, 2006).

Humanist philosophers believe individuals to be free, creative, responsible, unique and self directed, and support the need to provide an educational experience that meets these needs (McInerney & McInerney, 2006). McInerney (2005) suggested that philosophers of humanism believe humanistic approaches to teaching and learning soften the

structural and technical approaches within an educational context by recognising learners as central to the learning process as opposed to a product of the process. An example is the emergence of attention on caring schools and communities of learning in providing for the holistic needs of individuals.

This study required a thorough examination of the learner and self worth within the social context and, because of the complexity and sometimes inequity of social interaction, required a critical component. More recent literature associated with humanism reinforced the need for theoretical justification in the form of a more critical framework (Binder, 2001; Culpan, 2000; Culpan & Bruce, 2007; Farmer, 2001) that allowed for recognition and examination of the inequalities within social interaction that influence self worth (Binder, 2001; Culpan, 2000; Culpan & Bruce, 2007; Farmer, 2001). Kilgore (as cited in Willis, 2007) describes a critical perspective as ‘a critique of current ideology, seeking to expose dominating or oppressive relationships in society’ (p.82).

It has been suggested that researching from a critical perspective encourages critique of current practice and has the potential to provide foundations for social action but it has also been described as contentious as it encourages people to look outside the square with the intention of challenging the status quo (Fernandez-Balboa, 1997; Willis, 2007). This can be seen as a loss of control as systems and structures put in place to control oppressed groups are questioned and challenged.

Socio-critical humanism provided a framework for examining the perceived power relationships between individuals and groups of individuals. Willis (2007) suggested this allowed for critique of commonly held values and assumptions. In this case the socio-critical framework provided a schema for considering some aspects of the hidden curriculum, the socio-cultural characteristics of the learning environment and the relationships between teachers and their students.



## **Limitations**

This study was completed in partial fulfilment of requirements for a degree of Masters of Teaching and Learning. The part-time nature of this study presented some practical time constraints that contributed to some limitation on the scope of the research investigation.

As outlined in Chapter 3 some methodology aspects could have been further enhanced with greater researcher experience. Interviews were conducted with both teachers and students and while it was evident that interviewing both groups strengthened the data, on reflection, further interviews or classroom observations could have consolidated the data and further enhanced the methodology for the case study (Yin, 2009). This could have further enhanced the trustworthiness and credibility of the study.

While case study was a suitable methodology to use for this research, it is important to acknowledge that the main limitation of a case study was that the findings could not be generalised as all encompassing of teachers' and students' views in general (Bogden & Biklen, 2007; Yin, 2009).

## **Summary**

In summarising the methodological and theoretical framework, this dissertation has drawn on a qualitative research design that allowed for exploration of rich data. The interpretive paradigm was used as a framework for examining the subjectivity and interpretation of teachers' and students' perceptions of self worth in the learning environment. The qualitative method of case study was used to gather data and is supported by a humanistic philosophy in analysing and discussing the data. This allows for examination of self worth from an holistic perspective with particular emphasis on the social and emotional characteristics of human thought and behaviour. The socio-critical elements provided a framework for critique of inequalities that influenced self worth in the learning environment.

This chapter also provided a description of the ethical considerations associated with the case study with a particular emphasis on focus group interviewing and the researcher/participant relationship. Limitations of the study have been outlined with particular relationship to the researchers experience and a personal account of the researcher's interest, presence and bias has been presented.

## Chapter Four: Findings

The results were analysed according to the research questions outlined at the end of Chapter 3. This chapter documents the understandings, beliefs, attitudes and practices associated with self worth and learning in primary schools, of four teachers and four groups of students. The data collected was drawn from the teachers' and students' interview transcripts and has been presented in themes related to the interview questions. A number of themes emerged through the analysis of data but for the scope of this dissertation a focus was made on six key themes.

RESEARCH QUESTION	THEME
Q1. How do teachers and students describe good self worth and poor self worth?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teachers' and students' descriptions of good self worth.</li> <li>2. Teachers' and students' descriptions of poor self worth.</li> </ol>
Q2. From a teachers' and students' perspective how is self worth influenced in the learning environment?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Achievement.</li> <li>4. Teachers' qualities.</li> <li>5. Teachers' strategies.</li> <li>6. Significant others.</li> </ol>

### Research Question 1:

How do teachers and students describe good self worth and poor self worth?

The initial research question asked teachers and students to identify the characteristics of good self worth and poor self worth. Themes 1 and 2 (as described on page 68) emerged on analysis of the results.

## **1. Characteristics of good self worth**

The characteristics of good self worth were categorised into five aspects. The five aspects were based on the responses from both teachers and students. The five aspects of self worth were identified as the following:

- a. Emotional
- b. Physical
- c. Behavioural
- d. Social
- e. Attitudes

While both teachers' and students' responses related to the five aspects above it appeared that teachers and students weighted the groups differently. Most teachers' responses related to attitude and behaviour while students' responses related to the emotional and physical aspects.

### **a. Emotional**

Table 1 suggested that both teachers and students recognised emotional characteristics of good self worth. Students were able to reflect on various emotional characteristics while teachers described behaviours they might see if a child appeared to be what they thought was happy.

**Table 1: Emotional characteristics of good self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
	Proud
	Joy
	Passion
	Cheerful x2
	Excited
Happy to be at school	Happy
Happy to volunteer	
	Feel good

One teacher made reference to happiness as a characteristic of good self worth. The codes used at the end of each quote provide an indication of which teacher or focus group commented, e.g., T3 – Teacher 3, FG1 – Focus group 1.

*‘Happy to volunteer and happy to be here.’ (T3)*

Two groups of students described an emotional characteristic of good self worth by referring to the feeling of being proud.

*‘When they like um feel proud you can see them feeling proud in what they have done and achieved.... you know someone is proud of themselves because their whole attitude will change.’ (FG1)*

*‘They’re loud, proud and confident.’ (FG3)*

Two groups of students also described an emotional characteristic of good self worth as cheerfulness.

*‘They’re cheerful and they’re their normal self when they do better  
.....’(FG2)*

*‘Happy and cheerful’ (FG4)*

Other feelings such as joy, passion, feeling good and happy were referred to in statements such as;

*‘Joy and sometimes most people try to hide it ..... yeah passion about  
the sport’ (FG1)*

*‘Always excited... happy and ... cheerful’ (FG3)*

## **b. Physical**

Table 2 suggested that students were able to describe some characteristics of good self worth whereas teachers did not describe good self worth from a physical perspective.

**Table 2: Physical characteristics of good self worth**

TEACHERS’ RESPONSES	STUDENTS’ RESPONSES
	Smile x 3
	Facial expressions

Students described some physical characteristics of good self worth. Three groups of students acknowledged that facial expressions and in particular a smile were characteristics of good self worth.

*‘Facial expressions’ (FG2)*

### c. Behavioural

Table 3 indicated that both teachers and students recognised that good self worth was evident in particular kinds of behaviour.

**Table 3: Behavioural characteristics of good self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Quite mature	Ignore poor behaviour
	Normal selves
Leadership x2	Tells everyone about it
Can disagree with teacher	Noisy
Can ask teacher questions	Singing and dancing
High achievement	Skipping
Achievement across everything	Loud
Work full and complete – has extras	Jump around
Works hard	
Organised	
Good time management	
Good work habits	
Takes on new things	

This section was dominated by responses from teachers who listed characteristics related to work habit and the behavioural strategies they recognised as being relevant to good self worth.

*'They'll be ready for action, ready to go.'* (T3)

*'They're willing to get out there and give it a go' (T4)*

*'Risk takers, they're willing to take a risk' (T4)*

Teachers described how assertive skills and confidence to challenge teachers were behavioural characteristics more evident in students with good self worth.

*'They can say to me that they disagree with something, for example if I've handled a situation a certain way and they think it's unfair that they've got the courage to come forward and say um, 'I don't really think that's fair' and to say 'why and um, yeah, kids that question.' (T1)*

*'Anyone who is able to greet people confidently, ask questions of um, anybody, who is able to express what they want or what they need in a situation, um, who displays assertiveness, knows how to get what they want, um.' (T1)*

While students did not appear to mention the behavioural aspects of students with good self worth as much as teachers, some interesting comments were made. Students said students with good self worth were able to ignore the poor behaviour of other students, could be themselves and were more likely to tell everyone about a success.

*'Like some people have too much self worth and stuff and they like show off and stuff.' (T1)*

*'You can see them feeling proud of what they have like done or achieved.' (T1)*



#### d. Attitude

Table 4 provides an overview of attitude as a characteristic of good self worth and includes comments from both teachers and students. Similarities between some teachers' and students' comments were evident, for example 'confidence', 'enthusiasm', 'enjoyment' and changes in attitude.

**Table 4: Attitudes related to good self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Confident	Confident
Knows who they are	
No one can push them around	
Risk takers	
Willing to come forward	Always put hand up
Out there kind of kids	Always talking
Bubbly, Exuberant	Enthusiastic
Positive work	Enjoys work
Positive	
Open person	
Courage	Attitudes change

Teachers suggested that students with good self worth had a confident attitude suggesting that they were strong in nature and generally positive and motivated people.

*'No one can push them down.'* (T2)

*'Just got lots of confidence and quite a positive outlook and positive attitude.'* (T1)

*'Eager and self motivated.'* (T4)

Students also described people with good self worth to be confident people but described confidence from an extrinsic perspective, highlighting the behaviours they are likely to see in a confident person.

*'Yeah and telling everyone about it.'* (T1)

*'They're loud and always talking and ... always put up their hand.'*  
(T3)

Students also suggested that a change in attitude might be representative of someone with good self worth.

*'You know someone who is proud of themselves because their whole attitude might change.'* (T1)

#### **e. Social**

An overview of the social characteristics of good self worth (given in Table 5) and is dominated by comments from teachers. Students did not comment on the social aspects of good self worth.

**Table 5: Social characteristics of good self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Easy to make friends and keep them	
Communicates really well	
Not afraid to share ideas	
Mixes well with other students	
Works well in groups and individually	
Puts hand up to work with juniors	

Teachers described the social characteristics of good self worth. They recognised communication and relationships as being very good indicators of people with good self worth.

*'They seem to get on with other children really well and work extremely well in a group situation, they seem to find it easy to make friends, and keep them.'* (T1)

*'Yeah the way they behave, they'll come into the room, greet me, greet other kids um, sort of thing.'* (T3)

Teachers expanded on these comments by suggesting that the social characteristics associated with communication lead onto leadership qualities suggesting that students with good self worth tended to show more leadership qualities.

*'They're someone who's often able to be a leader and communicates really well in doing that, um quite an open person.'* (T2)

*'Mixes well with other students, um, shows some leadership skills, um, works well in a group as well as an individual situation.'* (T3)

## 2. Characteristics of poor self worth

A similar question was asked about characteristics that relate to poor self worth. In identifying these characteristics students were asked to describe the characteristics of people who do not appear to feel good about themselves. Teachers were asked the same question.

The responses were grouped into characteristics in the same way as identified for the previous themes. Of the five characteristics, four were repeated: emotional, physical, behavioural and attitudes. There were no responses relating to poor self worth which could be categorised as 'social'.

Both teachers and students described various physical characteristics and attitudes as being associated with poor self worth but differed in the behavioural and emotional aspects. Teachers mentioned the behavioural characteristics more frequently, while emotional characteristics were mentioned more by students.

### a. Emotional

Table 6 represents students' comments related to emotional characteristics of poor self worth. Teachers did not describe poor self worth from an emotional perspective.

**Table 6: Emotional characteristics of students with poor self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
	Feel left out
	Don't belong
	Sadness x2
	Depressed
	Grumpy
	Feel down x2

	Anger
	Negative
	Embarrassed
	Try to feel good about selves

Students used descriptive words to describe the emotional characteristics of poor self worth such as, depressed, grumpy, negative, angry, embarrassed etc.

*‘She wasn’t her normal self .... It’s a personality thing, like you can tell ... they’re grumpy or angry.’ (FG2)*

*‘All down and negative’ (FG4)*

*‘There’s this person who doesn’t feel good about themselves but then they try to feel good about themselves .... They show off and look all pretty cause people always be mean to that person .... They’re trying to feel good about themselves ... they’re trying to fit in.’ (FG4)*

Students suggested the emotional aspect of poor self worth could cause students to be excluded.

*‘Yeah left out of everything like most people don’t include people who don’t feel good about themselves and achieve high ..... Lots of people can achieve high and leave out all the people who are below them.’ (FG1)*

## **b. Physical**

Table 7 represents the physical characteristics identified by both teachers and students as representative of poor self worth.

**Table 7: Physical characteristics of students with poor self worth**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Dropped head x 2	Loud but just an act
No eye contact x 2	Acts shy but not
Mumbling x 2	Do noisy things
Heads down x 2	Show off
	Cool
<b>Quiet</b>	<b>Quiet x 2</b>
Reserved	In shock
	Boring
	Won't participate

Similarities between teachers' and students' comments were that they both indicated that students with poor self worth are quiet in class. They identified some physical characteristics such as the dropped head, not making eye contact, mumbling and heads hanging down.

*'Quiet and stuff' (T4)*

*'Just stand quietly' (T3)*

Students' responses however were more diverse and although students acknowledged that the person with poor self worth could be very quiet they also suggested that these people could react in the opposite way by being very loud, doing noisy things, showing off, being cool.

*'They show off.' (FG4)*

*'To get attention and be cool ..... yeah people think other people are cool so they try to be them.' (FG4)*

A difference between teachers' and students' comments was that students thought people with poor self worth could be behaving in the opposite way to the way they may be feeling.

*'He just does it so he acts ..... so people think he's confident ... I think he does it to get all the attention.'* (T3)

*'Sometimes they're covering up that they feel good but they don't feel good ..... if someone's being mean to them they just pretend it's all fun and stuff but they're like hurt inside.'* (T4)

When students were asked why someone would pretend to be this way they replied

*'They're always trying to fit in.'* (T4)

#### **d. Behavioural**

Table 8 provides an overview of some behavioural characteristics of poor self worth and includes teacher responses and student responses. Some similarities between teachers' and students' responses relate to being last to be picked for teams and avoiding sharing in class.

**Table 8: Behavioural characteristics of poor self worth**

TEACHERS RESPONSES	STUDENTS RESPONSES
Last to be picked	Picked last for teams
	Not included
Contributes less	Not confident
Not initiating	
Holds back when talking one on one	
Don't communicate	

Avoidance	
Don't share in class	Won't participate
Lost books and pencils	
Sometimes disorganised	
Doesn't take risks	
Always questioning 'Is this right?'	
Labels	
	Loners
	Attention seeker
	Try to get attention

There was some consistency between the responses from teachers and students in this section. Both teachers and students suggested that people with poor self worth were more likely to be last picked for teams and that they did not share in class or would not participate.

*'Like morning tea or lunch like some people leave out all the people that aren't that great at rugby or something and then they're picked last and then they feel bad and then they don't really want to play.'*  
(FG1)

*'They're not keen to be part of a team and quite often they're the last people to be picked.'* (T3)

Teachers identified a number of characteristics that represented 'avoidance' as a coping strategy such as contributing less, not initiating, holding back when talking one on one, not communicating, making excuses regularly, losing books and pencils.



*'Mumbling when you ask them a question, not contributing unless they're asked to and then they want to opt out rather than you know they hope that if you wait long enough you'll go onto the next person, not contributing much and um not initiating anything.'* (T1)

*'Quiet and reserved um and even when talking to me one on one they still kind of feel they hold back a lot ... they don't communicate and they don't share a lot in class.'* (T2)

*'Sometimes those kids who are totally disorganised, um they've always lost their book, or lost their pencil case or take a long time to find a pencil or pen.'* (T3)

Teachers discussed the confidence of students with poor self worth suggesting they were less likely to take risks and were often questioning whether they were right.

*'A child who is always questioning am I doing this right? Or, is this the right thing?'* (T3)

*'Low self-esteem and doesn't take risks'* (T4)

*'There's the group of high achievers and [we] don't feel like we want to hang around with them because we don't feel like we belong and we don't have the same attitude.'* (FG1)

Students identified very different characteristics of students with poor self worth suggesting that people with poor self worth were not often included and were loners to attention seeking.

*'They grow up to be a loner and be depressed'* (FG1)

*'He's shy but he acts like he's not .... I think he does it to get all the attention .... attention seeker!'* (FG3)

*'Most people don't include people who don't feel good about themselves.'* (FG1)

## Research Question 2:

Teachers' and students' perceptions of how self worth is influenced in the learning environment.

The second research question asked teachers and students to describe their perceptions of how self worth is influenced in the learning environment and Themes 3 to 6 (as described on page 68) emerged on analysis of the results.

### 3. Achievement

Achievement is the first of the four themes related to the second research question.

Table 9 includes teachers' and students' comments related to achievement with similarities in a number of areas such as avoidance, motivation and willingness to make mistakes. This theme also presented a difference between teachers' and students' comments. Students suggested achievement influenced self worthwhile while teachers suggested self worth influenced achievement. Comments related to under- achievement and avoidance have been identified.

**Table 9: Achievement as an influence on self worth in the learning environment**

TEACHERS RESPONSES	STUDENTS RESPONSES
	Winning things
	Don't like losing
	Ex girlfriends

Low self worth – not learning, avoidance	Negative comments about people's work can lead to avoidance in that area
Impacts on motivation and effort	Want to learn and want to come to school
Positive effect if students are willing to learn by making mistakes	Makes you good at it
	Helps you overcome disappointments and try again
Self doubt a big indicator on performance	Achieving good test results and high scores make you feel like you can do better – gives you confidence about other subject areas when you know you can achieve something
Low self worth (a negative framework) impacts on everything , i.e., ability to learn	Challenge– beating other class members
Less able to see the world as it actually is	OK if you are able to recognise that you can be good at some things and not at others
Not attending to things in the same way a bright/happy child would	If you don't like the teacher you might not learn in spite of them

### Under-achievement

According to students, achievement has a direct influence on self worth.

*'Self worth is really important .... I think if you get a really high test score but you didn't expect it and if self worth wasn't important and you feel happy about it yourself then that doesn't make sense.'* (FG1)

*'Like trialling out for something and then realising that you have made it ... like when I made the Canterbury Team'* (FG1)

*'Getting a high test score'* (FG1)

Students made reference to how underachievement could be a contributor to poor self worth.

*'Losing and getting something wrong [impacted negatively on self worth]' (FG1)*

Students also described the impact of under achievement on self worth suggesting that under achievement could have a positive outcome should the student have the skills to turn the situation around.

*'If I'm not good at something I aim higher, I go home and I study really hard so I can reach it ... Say if you're not good at soccer but you're really good at rugby you can't be let down by yourself because you're not good at soccer you can use the fact that you're good at rugby and boost your self esteem ..... that's what makes them aim higher.'* (FG1)

*'Makes you overcome disappointment, if you like sometimes you're like disappointed and you're like "no I can't do it" they make you feel good so you try again .... Gives you confidence about other subject areas ... makes you want to learn ... makes you good at it.'* (FG4)

All teachers indicated that poor self worth has a detrimental effect on student learning/achievement. They described the effect in various ways such as the impact on student beliefs, student motivation, wanting to come to school and the impact of a negative framework.

*'Mmmm ... for me it has a huge influence actually it's the key really isn't it to getting them on board and um their feeling about themselves, you know their belief about themselves impacts on everything around them ....poor sense of self worth impacts on students' motivation and their effort sometimes ... it's like oh I can't be bothered so I won't do it.'* (T4)

*'Poor self worth definitely impacts on learning, they want come to school .... when they're miserable and they're not happy with who they are and what's going on and what's happening they don't want to come to school, don't want to be here.'*(T3)

*'More and more I feel that if you've got a negative framework from which you are working that's probably the biggest thing on your mind which would mean it would detract from your ability to concentrate on anything else and everything that you do would be flavoured with that feeling ... If you've got all those physical things happening because you're lacking in self esteem you're probably less able to see the world as it really is and you're probably not attending to things the same as other kids that are bright and happy and open and confident.'* (T1)

Teachers believed that the way students felt about themselves could change in different circumstances or contexts of learning.

*'Self worth depends on [the] area [of learning].... A lot of sporting guys think they can't do the academic side of things .... Yeah it depends on where their strengths lie.'*(T4)

When teachers were asked how they could help improve self worth in their classrooms they referred to success and making connections between a success in one area and possibilities in other areas.

*'I would try to find an area where we could connect. I've actually done that with one of my new imports. He's really into music so we're doing 60s and 70s and we're doing a project .... It's like tapping into an interest really and an area of focus to build up those work habits, self belief really.'* (T4)

*'Quite often you get kids who achieve well in sport but then it starts to impact on their academic work. You see them develop more confidence in the written work and boys in particular at this age .... You see it perpetuate through the classroom and often classroom behaviour as well.'* (T3)

### **Avoidance**

Both teachers and students described avoidance as a characteristic of poor self worth and/or an inability to perform a task.

*'They've always lost their book or lost their pencil case and always take a long time to find a pencil or pen.'* (T3)

*'The quiet head down, not a naughty behaviour problem, the quiet head down, pretending to work, looking very busy, looking as if they're busy but not making eye contact, not answering questions, not really working with other kids, a bit of a loner.'* (T3)

Teachers voiced strong opinions about the influence of self doubt on performance/achievement.

*'Self doubt becomes a really big indicator of how well you perform.'*  
(T1)

## 4. Teachers qualities

Table 10 provided an overview that illustrated a similarity in both teachers' and students' comments. Teachers and students described how humour, fairness and inconsistency were likely to influence self worth. Students provided more responses in this section than teachers did.

**Table 10: Teachers' qualities: An influence on self worth in the learning environment**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Humour	Sense of humour
	Fun
Firm but fair	Fairness x3
	Digs out character
	Finds person inside person
	Teachers are nice to you
	Speaks the truth, honesty
	Teachers saying 'talk to me' and then not listening
	Teachers who speak the truth

### Humour

Teachers and students acknowledged that teachers demonstrating a good sense of humour contributed to self worth in the learning environment.

*'Using humour, trying to see the funny side of things, classrooms can get a bit serious at times .... You know responding to that side of them as well, have that bit of humour.'* (T1)

*'Teasing is funny ..... our teacher tried keeping a straight face when we were dancing, like next to him he's just like, I was like .... Are you trying not to laugh Mr P? And he's like 'No, no it's not amusing at all, it's very boring' and I was like 'Oh come on just laugh' and he's like 'he he he'. (FG3)*

## **Fairness**

Both teachers and students acknowledged the ability to be 'firm but fair' as contributing factors to enhancing students' self worth in the learning environment. Teachers described the importance of explanation as a process that helps students understand how a decision has been made.

*'Fairness is hugely, hugely important at this age group. If you explain what's going on, what's happening, why you're doing what you are doing, why this punishment is being given out, they will just agree with you, we don't have problems.'* (T3)

Teachers suggested that students of this age have a strong sense of social justice and the need to understand it from a teachers and a student's perspective is necessary. When teachers were asked what they thought students would say if they were asked to identify the most important characteristics of a teacher one teacher said;

*'I think fairness, you know, that equity thing, is really big for them, yeah they have a strong sense of justice and you've got to get it right.'*  
(T4)



Students appeared to have very strong feelings about fairness and related fairness to blame.

*‘Like she would blame us for stuff we wouldn’t do ... If someone treats someone unfairly it can break down their confidence.’ (FG1)*

*‘It has to be fair or otherwise we don’t do it.’ (FG3)*

Students described situations relating to classroom practice that they suggested were unfair and impacted on self worth. One group of students discussed the requirements of varying maths groups.

*‘... if you’re in a lower maths class you just get a stupid lecture ... they just play on computers, games and like we don’t get that ... the behind maths class, last time, got to make a big huge dodecahedron and they didn’t have to learn maths but we all did, which is not fair.’ (FG2)*

Another group of students talked about their frustrations and sense of ‘unfairness’ when they felt teachers did not take time to listen to both sides of an argument or disagreement.

*‘When a teacher doesn’t get the whole story’ (FG1)*

### **Inconsistency**

Students explained how teachers would say they liked students to talk to them but when they did teachers did not want to hear. Students suggested it impacted greatly on the confidence of the student because they would have had to build their confidence up to mention it in the first place.

*'In my old school we were talking about saying, the teacher was just saying that if you get a detention and you don't know why you've got it you can go up and ask and like say what really happened or why you think you shouldn't need one but then if you get a detention and you go up and tell them they'll us tell you that they don't want to hear it ... you feel like you can talk to them but when you go to do it you boost up your confidence to tell them, they don't want to hear it.'*  
(FG3)

*'They're [teachers] always saying about bullying, if like you go and tell them that you're being bullied they say you J----- you get a strike for being a tattletale.'* (FG3)

## 5. Teachers' strategies

Table 11 provides an overview of the teaching strategies that teachers and students recognised as being an influence on self worth. This theme was the largest of the six themes and provided the most similarity between teachers' and students' comments. Similarities included the need for identifying individual needs, monitoring feelings and behaviour, providing feedback, encouragement and praise, giving and receiving rewards, acknowledgement and support, providing opportunities for leadership, goal setting, teacher expectation, avoiding labels, enjoyment, creating opportunities, trust and freedom and a safe environment.

**Table 11: Teachers' strategies that influence self worth in the learning environment**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Assesses students' needs and feelings	Identifies needs
Sets goals and standards	Setting goals at the start of the school year
	Make activities fun

Teachers' messages - feedback	Feedback - Giving specific instruction
The way children are responded to including facial expressions	Redirecting wrong answers
How children are received by others	Explaining how improvements can be made
Verbal responses from others	Knowing you have done something well
How behaviours are reinforced	
Encouragement	Encouragement x 2
Encouragement to put selves forward	Teachers teaching you to keep on trying
Encourage students to justify themselves	Teachers who provide opportunities for students to be leaders
Look at students as individuals	Don't favour individuals
Don't label children	Setting goals at the start of the year
Find the good things in students	Give children a chance to speak
High expectations	Recognise individuals' work
	Compliments and nicknames
	Being told off but recognising that it could be for the best
	Recognising that it may have taken a huge amount of confidence to approach the teacher
	Don't put you off
Jobs that build on strengths	Organising monitors jobs
Providing exciting, fun things	Making activities fun
Programmes on self at the beginning of the school year such as buddy reading, multiple intelligences, Bloom's Taxonomy, health programmes – self efficacy	

Lots of group work	
	Great variety of cultural activities
Safe trusting environment	Trusted by more than one teacher
Establish a safe environment	Trust and allowing freedom
Opportunities to do things they are not good at	
Opportunities to show strengths	
Give children opportunities to challenge	
Opportunities for all	
Give children opportunities to challenge	
Encourage involvement	
Practise being out of comfort zone	
Ensure children know their ideas are being discussed with them personally	
Respect class rules	
Constant approaches to behaviour management	
How behaviours are reinforced	
	Play students' music
House points	Incentives, house points and raffles
Commendable student	Nick names
Lucky box draw	Incentive day and achievement
Personal and public recognition	Give out awards at assemble
Commendable student	End of term treats
Certain kinds of praise	Prizes and certificates
	Buy books as rewards

Family community	
Senior syndicate a school within school	
Get rid of streamed classes	

### Identifying individual needs

Teachers and students both acknowledged how identifying students' individual needs could influence self worth.

*'It's about finding the balance for each kid and what they need' (T2)*

*'It's something you hear all the time you know work from the kids own experiences, work from their own knowledge, but how often do we actually stop and actually consciously think about how we're going to do that for each individual, you know cause I'm thinking of those boys now, how their writing is very limited and they really lack ideas, but maybe if I said to them well write about how you felt you know performing in that, or how you felt about winning that race ..... '(T1)*

*'Just find the good in everyone really, regularly talking to the kids so you know the things that are important to them and sometimes I'll go to their sporting events.' (T4)*

*'I'd like to think that I really look at the kid as an individual rather than the group of bright kids, the group of sporty kids you know let them go and do what they need to do and give them opportunities to show their strengths and show what they're good and also you know give them opportunities to do things that they're not good at in a safe and not so protected environment, you know an environment that they feel comfortable in to take those steps ... make the environment that everyone's part of a team or the family that everyone is supportive' (T2)*

*'Someone who can identify what a person needs or wants' (FG1)*

## Monitoring students' feelings and behaviour

Teachers described how finding the good in students could enhance self worth and that monitoring students' feelings and behaviours at the start of the day was an important strategy and a contributing factor to maintaining and perhaps enhancing self worth.

*'I think you just have to monitor that you know their feelings and behaviour at the start of the day and I can normally gauge that by just going 'Hi how are you now and sometimes the parents will call and let me know if there's been anything happening at home if there's anything I need to know of.' (T4)*

## Feedback

It was evident that both explicit or implicit messages impacted on the students' self worth. Teachers suggested that adults' feedback to students contributed to the way students saw themselves in the world. Students indicated the need for more specific feedback about what they do wrong and how they can progress:

*'I think the way they are responded to, the way they are, you know, how their behaviours are reinforced and that would be from adults or peers, and how they're received by others, it's the feedback they get from the world I think that does an awful lot to contribute to how they see themselves in that world ..... so I guess a lot of negative feedback, a child would quickly feel that they lack self worth.' (T1)*

*'They should like tell us what's wrong with it so we can fix it cause they say "do it again, make it better" and we don't know how to make it better, we don't know how to make it better cause if it's our best.' (FG3)*

## Encouragement

Both teachers and students said that encouragement enhanced self worth. Teachers made reference to the need to try and encourage everyone.

*'You're encouraging them to put themselves forward ..... you encourage every single child to get involved in something' (T3)*

*'Just try to build them up as much as possible and give them as much support' (T4)*

Students recognised the need for teachers to be encouraging and described the impact if teachers were or were not encouraging.

*'Oh like being encouraged like we've got one kid in the class who just gets told off ... he doesn't get encouraged he just gets told off. If people don't encourage him that's why he'll fall behind' (FG1)*

*'When they encourage you to do something good' (FG1)*

## Acknowledgement

Students said that knowing you had done something well was important. Teachers' responses supported this and expanded it with more specific examples such as how behaviours were reinforced, certain kinds of praise, how children were received by others and verbal responses from others.

*'Or the look you might put on your face when you've sent them to do something .... I think there's probably hundreds of ways that you don't recognise that you are actually giving messages'....'I think the way they are responded to and the way their behaviours are reinforced by adults and their peers and how they're received by others ..... It's*

*the feedback they get from the world I think that does an awful lot to contribute to how they see themselves in that world.’ (T1)*

*‘You don’t even have to say ‘fantastic work’ or whatever it’s that suddenly you treat them slightly differently and you do that subconsciously because suddenly your expectation of that child is slightly different.’ (T3)*

Students felt their teachers had recognised them as individuals when they made up nicknames for them.

*‘like an instructor at camp, he was real cool, he just like always encouraged us and stuff, like when we were doing ropes, and he gave us all like nicknames and stuff’ (FG3)*

## **Praise**

Students acknowledged that praise can be overdone and in doing so can lose effect.

*‘Teachers need to make you feel that they really want to praise you, like don’t just say well done ..... only praise if they’ve actually done something really good and yeah don’t praise them for the sake of it’ (FG4)*

While praise was an important aspect for both teachers and students, the type of praise, and the affect of these types of praise on learning was discussed in more depth by teachers.

*‘Some kids like lots of praise and some kids like open praise like you’re doing really well in front of the whole class, some kids like just a little note in the bottom of their book. They don’t want to be openly praised especially I think sometimes those the bright kids are the kids that have been labelled as the brainy kids don’t want to have the*



*constant praise out there .... They don't want to be the person that's way out there, they want to be part of the pack but by giving them the praise that this really good in their book.'* (T2)

*'It's a buzz .... Well look at me I've been praised for such and such I'm really good with wee kids and it's through other teachers and them telling me and it just seems to put a smile on their face and really boosts them .... Sometimes it's other kids building them up all the time too just saying look you can do this just knuckle down and do it.'* (T4)

Teachers acknowledged that too much praise could have an undesired effect. They suggested too much praise can influence the student's motivation to extend themselves.

*'By constantly giving a kid the certificate in assembly constantly giving the kid praise they start to just do the status quo .... They don't extend themselves ..... each kid has their own way of taking praise and receiving praise.'* (T2)

When teachers were asked to explain why they thought public praise affected boys in this way they responded by saying:

*'They want to be more socially accepted, they're in a place in their lives where they don't want to be outside the square.'* (T2)

Some teachers agreed that public praise can be detrimental for boys:

*'I think a lot of year 7/8 boys have got to a point that they don't like public reward, they walk back all awkward and not want to look at anybody ..... and it appears rude and then people think they are rude but it's actually just that they're ashamed in front of their peers.'* (T1)

*'I've got some boys who still love being told, 'look I think that's a fantastic effort' but they don't like it being done really publicly, you do it quietly in their ear as you're walking past them .... A bit of free time and recognition, 'Hey you did a really great job today you can go early' ..... I think what impacts more on self worth is the personal stuff.'* (T1)

### **Giving and receiving rewards**

All of the teachers discussed the kind of reward systems they had in their classes and the positive effects they perceive these rewards to have had on the learning environment.

*'I've got on my board just an area where I've got the heading commendable students and if their name goes up there then they can win house points ..... also a similar system running through the school where they get tickets if they're spotted in the playground for anything positive and they can get a ticket in the lucky box for a draw at assembly and they can then select a prize'* (T1)

Students talked positively about their classroom reward systems and described the processes in detail. They seemed to have a very clear understanding of what the rewards process was and how it was implemented.

*'If you do something good you get like a raffle point and you put it in the book and then like you draw it out.'* (FG4)

*'At the end of the year you get movie tickets if you got lots of certificates.'* (FG3)

*'Getting house points or raffle points .... house points are our whole school and raffle tickets are just our class ..... awards or prizes or certificates or little incentives I think that it builds confidence and how they feel about themselves.'* (FG1)

While teachers believed that tangible rewards still had a positive effect on Year 8 students they did acknowledge that not all students would like to receive these rewards publically. They believed that, as with public praise, receiving a reward publically could, and in some cases did, cause embarrassment for students.

*'I think that a lot of Year 7 and 8 boys have got to a point where they don't like public recognition.'* (T1)

Students' responses to feelings associated with receiving rewards publically varied.

*'You're a little embarrassed especially if they just single you out cause yeah they make you stand up ... you feel good but a little embarrassed.'* (FG4)

Students acknowledged that the importance of certificates lost credibility when they realised they were given to everyone and everyone would eventually receive one.

*'I think that with certificates the teachers usually do it so everyone gets a turn which is good but also sometimes you feel like they're only doing it because of that'* (FG3)

Students also acknowledged that they would prefer a teacher who spoke the truth rather than a teacher who gave them something tangible.

*'Personally I don't like bribing teachers I just like teachers that speak out the truth. I like teachers that can actually trust you to walk around the school and do jobs for them.'* (FG1)

*'They give you rewards in assembly like they choose two people and you get an award .... They're dumb, it's just like a piece of paper with like a 1 or 2 and your name. I think they could do better.'* (FG2)

### **Teacher support for students**

Students saw value in the interactions between teachers and students and focussed on the positive and negative aspects of interaction. Positive interactions related to the support and complimentary comments teachers gave their students.

*'Mr P he kind of like gives us the freedom to choose what we do and that kind of makes us feel confident.'* (FG3)

*'Yeah my teacher in Nelson, she was really cool like she would , well she did compliment us but it was more like, she didn't put us down, and like if we did say something wrong she didn't say we got it wrong she'd just say like it's not completely right ..... but she showed us how to get it right. If you do something well then she compliments you about it all the time and if you make a mistake on something else then she'd say oh you'll get it better next time while some people think if you make a mistake at the start they always think you're bad at that particular ... whatever... they trust you to be responsible and not irresponsible.'* (FG3)

*'Try and build them up as much as possible and give them as much support, and give them time in the class if they need it..... it might be the 'one to one' that could make a difference.'* (FG3)

*'You don't even have to say 'fantastic work' or whatever. It's that suddenly you treat them differently and you do that subconsciously because suddenly your expectation of that child is slightly different.'* (T3)

Students described some variables that impact negatively on teacher/student interactions. Two groups were very explicit about the students' rights to confidentiality.

*'We told our teacher something and then it supposedly came out in a meeting so how did the other teachers know about it?' ... 'Yeah it goes in the staffroom and everyone talks about it ..... like if you tell something you can tell because another teacher will come up to you and say to talk about it and you're like how did you find out?'* (FG2)

*'The teachers gossip cause me and K had a fight right and our teacher ended up knowing .... It was so annoying cause she'd like just gossiped about it and all the teachers knew .... they just tell all the other teachers what we say kind of thing'.... 'When teachers keep gossiping you can't trust to tell them something ... they say to tell them if like people are picking on you and stuff but you can't cause they just tell everyone else. Teachers say you can tell them these personal things but you can't because they just turn and all the students end up finding out.'* (FG3)

Students described how teachers talking behind their backs to other staff impacted on them but they also referred to the way teachers talked about other individuals within earshot of other students.

*'When teachers come into a class they start talking about a kid and you hear it and you can't help but ...'* (FG3)

## **Opportunities for leadership**

Teachers felt that encouraging students to put themselves forward would impact on self worth, and students have supported that by suggesting that teachers who provide opportunities for students to be leaders, and teachers who make students feel like leaders, impacts positively on self worth.

*'Our children get lots of opportunities to get involved with the things like the student council, um house captains, and deputy captains, wet day monitors, lunch monitors, road patrol, all this sort of thing. And you try to encourage because we're only a syndicate of 145, you can encourage every single child to get involved in something. You know you're encouraging them to put themselves forward.'* (T3)

*'He kind of like gives us the freedom to choose what we do and that kind of makes us feel confident. Cos he like, kind of trusts us which is good cos when he gives us the cow he trusts us, yeah it's like a computer on wheels.'* (T2)

*'Give them jobs to build on their strengths for example the wee guy who did the recycling. It's a leadership thing for him and its not a huge one but he's just happy to go and do it automatically. He's picked up on that, taking responsibility for something and it's actually coming through in his work.'* (T4)

*'... there's a touch tournament we've been doing at the moment, we've got coaches, refs and sort of team leaders ... I've got one [boy] who's hated doing any written work whatsoever but since we've been doing this sports together he's been taking a big leading role in sport, he's on the student council and he's been doing my drink selling at lunch time ... when you see them succeed in physical education and team sport you start to see it perpetuate through the classroom and often classroom behaviour as well.'* (T3)

Students appeared to respond well to what they saw as leadership opportunities but they suggested that being offered these opportunities meant they were trusted by teachers. Being recognised as a trusted person within their school meant a lot within their peer group.

*'Personally I don't like bribing teachers. I just like teachers that speak out the truth. I like teachers that can actually trust you to walk around the school and do jobs for them.'* (FG1)

*'Everyone would know you and everyone would trust you since the teachers trust you ..... makes you feel like leaders amongst leaders ... getting trusted because then through your whole high school years and through stuff like that you can be trusted from all the teachers because a teacher from this school tells the whole high school people that you can be trustworthy.'*(FG1)

*'You feel better about yourself if you are trusted and given leadership roles.'*(FG1)

### **High expectations**

Teachers acknowledged the need to maintain high expectations of students and to encourage students to justify themselves.

*'... high standards and constantly promoting that within your room'*  
(T4)

*'I think that if you set the goal, set the standard then they'll come up to it.'* (T3)

### **Avoiding labels**

Teachers indicated the need to avoid labelling children when aiming to enhance self worth.

*'It's really important as a teacher that you don't take labels from someone else that had them last year or from you know [the*

*student's] brother ... sometimes I see kids who have been labelled not as themselves but through a family member and it carries on through [their school life] and they never get rid of it.' (T3)*

## **Enjoyment**

Both teachers and students commented on the need to make activities enjoyable. Teachers emphasised the importance of the principal's role suggesting principals need to be able to provide messages to students that learning is enjoyable.

*'Our current principle is a great believer of providing a lot of exciting and fun things for the kids to do.' (T1)*

Students described how some teachers made learning fun. They said;

*'In triathlon training she made us run around a box ..... this year we didn't mind triathlon training cause we got to go round all the playground.' (FG3)*

*'If you can put things like fun things and learning together it's just easier .... cos if you just do something like maths sheets you might not learn as much cause it's just not fun .... Kind of mix them together.' (FG4)*

## **Creating opportunities**

Some teachers indicated that self worth was influenced by the teacher's ability to create opportunities for individuals within the classroom learning environment:

*'They get lots of opportunities to be involved and lots of opportunities to be independent.' (T3)*



*'Give them opportunities to show their strengths and show what they're good at ... it's about finding the balance for each kid and what they need.'* (T2)

*'You've got to try and provide all kids with an opportunity to grow and develop and they've got different talents so it's just trying to find, and some of them you don't find, but you've got to try and seek out the one good thing .... and encourage them to do that ...'* (T3)

Some teachers discussed the need to provide students with opportunities to present their work in different ways.

*'I think the context in which they are learning and the way in which they are expected to present .... I think the way in which we pressure them into giving a speech in front of the class and they're afraid to do it and I've tried to give them the opportunity to record themselves and do it with a few people and then work on their self worth and move up a few steps and then do it in front of a larger group.'* (T2)

Teachers made reference to the importance of the principal's role in providing opportunities for students.

*'Provide as many opportunities as they can .... The principal that we've currently got is a great believer in providing lots of exciting and fun things for kids to do and so he's at the moment investigating all sorts of things that he's going to bring in, which will be fantastic and I can see the power of those things for the kids.'* (T1)

### **Teachers trusting students and allowing freedom**

Students described how teachers trusting students enhanced self worth. They felt they were trusted by their teachers when their teachers gave them freedom.

*'Our teacher like gives us the freedom to choose what we do and that kind makes us feel confident, cause he kind of like trusts us.'* (FG3)

*'Friends show you respect and they can learn from you especially if they are a bit younger than you like we're year eight and they're year seven and then you come back to see that they have learned from something that you have taught them and that makes you feel really good.'* (FG1)

### **Safe environment**

Teachers described how providing a safe learning environment enhances self worth.

*'[Students should be] able to learn from making mistakes.'* (T2)

*'Making it safer and making it [a] place that they want to be. I think a good example is when I had a boy in my class who's not really a great, he doesn't like to write stuff down he's sort of out there a wee bit. I grabbed him and put him into a film making group and his self worth just went up because it was something that he was into and it was something that was shown to the whole school.'* (T2)

Teachers described the need to create a family orientated learning environment with the view to enhance self worth within the learning environment.

*'It's just about making that environment that everyone's part of the team or the family that everyone is supportive.'* (T2)

Teachers discussed the negative implications of ability grouping within the learning environment and the influence on self worth. They suggested students are well aware of the level of the group they are placed in and indicated that these groupings have a lasting effect on the students understanding and perceptions of themselves as successful learners and overall self worth.

*'You've got kids in the bottom reading groups, they've been in that bottom reading group forever and a day, and your expectation is that they will always be in that bottom reading group .... I mean certainly in my class I do a lot of flexible grouping so that the bottom kids are always mixed up with the other kids, and it makes a huge difference .... They're beginning to think oh she's put me with so and so and she's really good and suddenly you've got a whole different attitude going on.'* (T3)

## 6. Significant others

Table 12 was dominated by comments from students who suggested that the network of people surrounding them impacted on their self worth. Although dominated by students teachers did acknowledge that self worth was influenced by the relationships students had with their peers and with their parents/caregivers.

**Table 12: Significant others**

TEACHERS' RESPONSES	STUDENTS' RESPONSES
Parental messages	Parents teaching you to keep on trying
	Parents not judging you
	Coaches ringing up and talking to you before a game
	Role models – inspiration x2
	Inspiration – All Blacks
	Friends – respect, comfort, talk, believe in you
	Enemies – tease you and make you feel left out
	Playing games – referee and opposition
	Other people exaggerating story
Peers	Peer pressure

	Seeing younger children learn from you
	Ex girlfriends

### **Parental/caregiver messages**

Teachers acknowledged how parental messages were both positive and negative, and how there were hidden messages associated with body language.

*‘Parental messages I guess and obviously teacher messages would be quite significant .... The look that you might put on your face when you’ve seen them do something or you know there’s probably hundreds of ways that you don’t recognise that you’re actually giving messages.’ (T1)*

Students described how parents/caregivers influenced self worth when describing their role models or when identifying situations where they had been let down in the form of a reaction from a parent.

*‘My Mum because she’s hard working and organises stuff real good’  
(FG1)*

*‘My Dad because he takes the time out to send me to Canterbury and takes the money to send me off to Blenheim and Timaru’ (FG1)*

### **Influence of peers**

The influence of peers on self worth was discussed by both teachers and students but teachers described the interactions to be positive while students acknowledged both the positive and negative impact of peer relationships.

*'Peer pressure ..... it changes people cause first they are alright not goody two shoes. It changes people from being normal from being themselves it changes them to being a person they are not or like changing to being wanting to fit in with other people or want to be gangster.'* (FG3)

*'I can think of a child right now who would be far more confident with adults than with peers and I think it's probably because he hasn't got siblings.'* (T4)

When teachers were asked about self worth and peer relationships they said students with what appeared to be good self worth developed positive peer relationships;

*'They work extremely well in a group situation, they seem to have, find it easy to make friends and keep them'* (T4)

Teachers suggested that students who appeared different in any way did not always develop or maintain positive peer relationships.

*'This child is particularly bright and does not have a lot in common with his peers.'* (T4)

Some teachers talked about the dynamics of peer groups suggesting that there were certain rules, often unsaid rules, which students adhered to. They also suggested that peer groups were important to students and that some students would do anything to fit in;

*'Kids are pretty loyal within their groups but if somebody breaks the rules they might be sort of outcast for a bit if they've done something wrong within the group.'* (T3)

*'At this age they are going through puberty and they're so much more self conscious, and it's much more important for them to fit in.'* (T4)

## **Sport coaches**

It was evident that students respected the work of their sport coaches and described the impact of their interactions with their coaches as positive, inspirational and definitely contributing factors to the development of their self worth.

*'My coach at Hornby rings me up. He gives you a talk before a game ..... yeah he says good things to us ..... yeah like before a Canterbury game he came to my Canterbury game and he says things like you've got to draw into your head that you made it here and you deserve to be here and stuff like that.'* (FG1)

*'Probably my coach ..... oh cause he's like an inspiration cause he speaks the truth but he speaks it in a role model [way] .... Like if you do something that's really bad he will tell you but he tells you in a truthful words.'* (FG1)

Some students used the word 'role model' to describe their coaches and they were able to articulate why they categorised their coaches as role models.

*'I say [role models are inspirational when they make you] see something and you can learn from something that it will stay with you forever.'* (FG1)

## **Other family members**

Students suggested other family members influenced self worth, but teachers did not mention other family members.

*'My role model would probably be my oldest brother because if he plans to do something he does it. He doesn't leave it for tomorrow or*

*leave it for someone else to do it he will always do it and he makes a promise or he says something and he will fulfil that.’ (FG1)*

*‘My sister because we talk about everything’ (FG2)*

While students placed more emphasis on family members as influences on self worth they also suggested that famous people could be seen as inspirational. When asked to describe a famous person they suggested the following;

*‘JK Rowling .....cause she writes a book like you are watching a movie’ (FG1)*

*‘All Blacks .... Inspiration’ (FG1)*

## **Summary**

This chapter provides a summary of the findings determined by thematic analysis. The findings are a description only and form the basis for the discussion chapter to follow. In summarising the results it is clear that the six separately documented themes are dialectically related, i.e., the relationship recognises two or more entities that are both separate in their own right, but mutually presuppose to each other (Stith and Roth, 2008). For example achievement is interconnected with students’ self worth although the two are separate entities. It is these dialectical relationships between themes that are illustrated within the discussion chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

This chapter discusses the key findings from the study. The discussion centres on the six themes identified in Chapter Four: Findings:

1. Characteristics of good self worth
2. Characteristics of poor self worth
3. Achievement
4. Teachers' qualities
5. Teachers' strategies
6. Significant others

Themes 1 and 2 related to the first research question and the remaining themes related to the second research question. However, the six themes were inevitably interrelated and it was evident that many of these themes had a dialectical relationship to each other. Dialectical relationships between themes were discussed throughout this section. Discussion related to the six themes and provided insight into the similarities and differences in teachers' and students' perceptions of self worth in the learning environment and in doing so provided some response to the sub question related to research question 2.



## **Research Question 1: How do teachers and students describe good self worth and poor self worth?**

This question provided an insight into both teachers' and students' descriptions of good self worth and poor self worth through the analysis of students' beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. It illustrated teachers' and students' views of the multidimensional nature of self worth by outlining characteristics of self worth associated with physical, social, emotional and behavioural aspects and related attitudes. Characteristics of good self worth were categorised into five groups: emotional, physical, behavioural, social and attitudes. Of these five groups, four were also evident as characteristics of poor self worth with the social being the exception. Teachers and students provided similar responses in some themes but very different response and emphasis in other themes. This could be related to the knowledge teachers had in relation to teaching and learning and their ability to articulate their ideas compared to the level of students' knowledge and/or the students' ability to describe what they saw. Implications for classroom practice have been outlined at the end of each theme.

### **1. Characteristics of good self worth**

#### **Similarities in teachers' and students' responses:**

- Students with good self worth contributed by volunteering, putting hands up, sharing ideas and taking on new things.
- Students usually had an area/context in which they achieved and reinforced the need to capitalise on this area/context to enhance the development of overall self worth.

Results indicated that teachers and students believed self worth impacted on students' beliefs about self, and their attitudes and learning behaviours in the classroom. This was consistent with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) which represented self belief/worth as a contributing factor to the development of behaviours associated with learning. The view that the belief in self is a contributing factor, not the only factor contributing to learning and achievement, was supported in this study. Teachers' and students' views were consistent with Hofmann Nemiroff (1992) and Pajaries and Schunk (2001), who suggested a combination of self worth and other factors, such as specific knowledge and skills, and interest in the topic, contributed to success/achievement in the classroom.

Similarities in the responses of both teachers and students relating to the emotional and behavioural characteristics of self worth suggested they showed similar understanding. It was interesting to note that in describing students with good self worth teachers referred broadly to 'happiness' while students tended to also identify components of happiness such as 'joy' and 'cheerfulness'. This was consistent with Branden (as cited in Marsh, 2006) and Marsh (2006) who suggested there were strong correlations between self worth and the individuals' overall wellbeing. Both teachers and students described students with high self worth as generally happy people and generally happy to be at school;

*'... always happy and cheerful' (FG4)*

*'... happy to be here' (T3)*

Teachers' and students' descriptions of good self worth were similar to literature (Hutley & Eskeles-Gottfried, 2008; Hipkins, 2005; Shavelson *et al*, 1976) and suggested positive beliefs, attitudes and behaviours were indicative of good self worth. Teachers appeared to associate positive attitudes with confident behaviour and it was likely that this combination represented good self worth. Teachers suggested that students who displayed attributes of good self worth such as confidence, positive attitudes and positive outlooks appeared more mature and more organised in the

classroom. One teacher described students with good self worth as ‘ready for action’, and ‘ready to go’ which reinforced the perception that good self worth influenced behaviours and attitudes towards classroom activities. Further to this teachers suggested that students with good self worth had the confidence and assertiveness to ask questions and at times disagree with teachers. While these kinds of behaviours may have been recognised by teachers in this study as characteristics of good self worth it was reasonable to consider that confident behaviours such as those outlined above could also be viewed by some/other teachers as outspoken and rude.

Students suggested that students with good self worth were able to ‘be themselves’. This could suggest that they had the confidence to behave as they wanted to and were not intimidated and/or influenced by others into having to constrain their behaviours. This was reinforced by teachers’ views which suggested students with good self worth tended to have strong social skills and as a result, formed positive relationships. Teachers seemed to think that this was because students with good self worth demonstrated a high degree of social understanding and were able to make appropriate connections with teachers and other students.

*‘... they seem to get on with other children really well ... they seem to find it easy to make friends and keep them’ (T1)*

*‘... the way they behave, they’ll come into the room, greet me, greet other kids’ (T3)*

According to Hipkins (2005), the development and understanding of the ‘self’ was not separated from the social environment and interactions with others. Evidence in this study indicated that students exhibiting good self worth were perceived to be advantaged in their interactions with others and their social environment. This could suggest that teaching strategies such as reciprocal teaching had the potential to enhance students’ confidence, produce more positive attitudes towards learning and improve self worth. However, it was important to acknowledge that reciprocal teaching strategies relied on social interaction, and students in this study noted that social interactions with

peers were not always positive. Research related to these strategies suggested students could be a more powerful model to other students than their teachers because of the connections students had with each other through their own peer culture and that if these strategies that enhance peer interaction were managed well a positive outcome could be obtained (Nuthall, 2007; Ormrod, 2008).

Teachers stated that students with good self worth tended to be ‘risk takers’ which could suggest that these students were able to separate feelings from actions and make attempts without fear of failure. Such views lend support to Bandura (1986) and Hipkins (2005) who believed that in some cases, perceptions of ability to achieve could override actual ability to achieve. Similarly, findings in this study reinforced the role of self perception or self efficacy (Bandura, 1986) as important in the development of individuals’ overall perceptions of themselves and therefore their learning capabilities. This heightened the place and importance of self belief and self worth in the learning process and to some degree reinforced how easy it may be to enhance students’ beliefs about themselves as learners and consequently their ability to achieve. It reinforces the need to ensure pre-service teachers are provided with the understanding and skill to enhance self belief/worth as part of the learning process.

There were similarities between teachers’ and students’ views and Shavelson’s *et al* (1976) work relating to domain-specific self concept and consequently self worth. Teachers suggested that success in one area had the potential to transfer success related behaviours and attitudes to other areas reinforcing the notion that success bred success:

*‘Friends show you respect and they can learn from you especially if they are a bit younger ... you come back to see that they have learned from something that you have taught them and that makes you feel really good.’ (FG1).*

A broad range of characteristics associated with good self worth were identified in this study. It was evident that individuals who possessed perceived characteristics of good self worth were confident and capable in many areas. It was also evident that

individuals who were able to perceive themselves to be confident and capable demonstrated good self worth and were more likely to achieve and experience more satisfactory interactions within the learning environment (Bandura, 1986). This had implications for the classroom teacher in relation to the variety of opportunities that could be provided to enhance the prospect of success for all students and as a result improve self worth. More important was the need to implement a variety of teaching strategies and learning contexts that had the potential to enhance students' feelings of perceived ability, attitudes towards learning and their social place in the classroom. (Bandura, 1986; Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007; Shavelson *et al*, 1976).

Implications were that good self worth appeared to be manifest in student behaviour in various ways but it was also clear that these behaviours were positive and accrued affirmation which tended to reinforce the ongoing development of students' self worth in an almost cyclic fashion. While it was important to recognise that it was likely many students arrived at school with good self worth it was equally evident that experiences, specifically social experiences at school, had significant influence on the development of good self worth.

## **2. Characteristics of poor self worth**

### **Similarities and differences in teachers' and students' responses:**

- Students with poor self worth lacked interest and wanted to be by themselves.
- One teacher suggested that self worth issues are often greater than their experiences at school and can lead to students wanting to avoid school altogether.
- Students suggested students with poor self worth can also be loud, noisy and can show off as a strategy for hiding lack of confidence.

There were similarities between teachers' and students' comments in the themes related to behavioural characteristics, and perceived attitudes, of students with poor self worth. Teachers and students indicated that students with poor self worth were more likely to avoid contact with others and situations where they were required to participate and contribute in class.

*'They don't communicate and they don't share a lot in class' (T2).*

*'They're just negative towards activities' (FG4).*

Explicit behaviours exhibited by students with poor self worth appeared to carry a negative social and/or behavioural connotation and were often very obvious in the classroom learning environment. This reinforced the strong link, and to some degree complexity, between what students thought about themselves as under-achievers, and their consequent behaviour (Branden, as cited in Marsh, 2006; Farmer, 2001; Marsh, 2006). It highlighted the need for teachers to be more pro-active about looking for the affective and behavioural connections and providing for students' social and emotional needs. This was consistent with Farmer (2001) who suggested that in a classroom environment teachers needed to view students from an holistic perspective to ensure they maximised opportunities of enhancing students' self worth.

Findings indicated that there were two predominant and interrelating reasons as to why students with poor self worth tended to avoid participation. First it appeared that students with poor self worth found interacting with others difficult and lacked confidence in social situations. Second, students with poor self worth did not want to be seen to be under achieving in front of peers and generally found under-achievement difficult to manage in their social setting.

*'I don't know if they haven't got the subject matter or if they are afraid that what they say might be wrong' (T2).*

*'Some people leave out all the people that aren't that great at rugby or something and then they're picked last and then they feel bad and then they don't really want to play' (FG1).*

Evidence suggested that under achieving and associated self worth impacted on students' social interactions with teachers and peers in the learning environment. Under achieving in either the classroom or the playground seemed to influence students' self worth and not surprisingly led to avoidance-related behaviour. It became apparent that for students with poor self worth it was easier to avoid an activity than to risk drawing attention to themselves through lack of ability. With this in mind it appeared that avoidance-related strategies served their purpose in that students who feared failure had a personal safety net (Brophy, 2004; Siefert, 2004). In one focus group a student observed:

*'... then there's the group of high achievers ...they don't want to hang around with them because they don't belong there with them and they don't feel or have the same attitude as the people who have done very well.' (FG1)*

In addition to some students with poor self worth tending to remove themselves from the social environment through feelings of inadequacy, it was also evident in some cases that students with poor self worth exhibited certain kinds of antisocial behaviour. Unfortunately, this antisocial behaviour influenced their interactions with peers who may have otherwise been inclusive. For example students with poor self worth appeared to do noisy things in what was seen by students to be an attempt to deliberately misbehave and 'show off'. This may suggest that students with poor self worth wanted to hide their lack of confidence. Being loud was a distraction and moved attention away from lack of ability to something else (Brophy, 2004; Siefert, 2004). Some students with poor self worth were still brave enough to risk gaining attention for something else, and it did not appear to matter that this was associated with negative attention.

Some teachers and students perceived behaviours such as making excuses and avoiding participation as a lack of motivation. This perceived lack of motivation shared similarities to Siefert's Theory of Avoidance (2004) where students made deliberate attempts to avoid having to demonstrate academic or social ability. This was consistent with findings that suggest students who did not feel like they could achieve at school and/or struggle to feel like they belonged in their classroom used strategies that were more likely to be avoidance related. This was similar to literature associated with self efficacy which suggested that if self efficacy was low chances were high that individuals would withdraw to avoid challenges and perhaps embarrassment (Bandura, 1986; Ennis, 2000; Moltzen, 2005). While avoidance as a strategy allowed the student to escape the demands of achievement, it had implications in that it limited opportunities for students to experience success and consequently enhance self worth. In summary, it appeared that the process of enhancing poor self worth needed to begin with the development of students' feelings and perceptions of themselves before feelings and perceptions of ability could be confronted (Bandura, 1986).

Consistent with Avoidance Theory (Siefert, 2004) was the acknowledgement by teachers and students that the issue was much greater than the experiences students had at school. One teacher suggested feelings of failure and associated poor self worth could lead students to want to avoid school altogether.

*'When they're miserable and they're not happy with who they are and what's going on and what's happening they don't want to come to school, don't want to be here' (T3).*

It seemed that feelings of failure and associated poor self worth could influence students' choice of behaviour. Students would choose to avoid learning situations and go to lengths to avoid school altogether if it provided them with a means of avoiding public failure. Of concern is that these acts of avoidance, in an attempt to protect self worth, could lead to sustained periods of absence from school. This had the potential of escalating and had significant implications for truancy.



Brophy (2004) made links between avoidance related behaviour associated with poor self worth and failure syndrome. He suggested there were links between failure syndrome and prior experience and reinforced the need to recognise characteristics of poor self worth mentioned by teachers such as fear, apprehension, lack of desire and reluctance as behaviours associated with negative prior experiences. In recognising the significance of prior experience on students' poor self worth it reinforced the need to acknowledge a connection between prior experience and self worth in the classroom. Brophy (2004) suggested attempts needed to be made to re-socialise students by dealing with prior experiences. This may be a strategy that has the potential of enhancing students' self worth.

Implications of poor self worth were that students could attempt to protect their self worth by using avoidance related strategies in the classroom to ensure their lack of ability was not evident to others. These strategies had the potential to inhibit learning and achievement and in doing so impact on possible opportunities for enhancing self worth and developing positive attitudes towards lifelong learning. It appeared to be a classic 'chicken and egg' scenario. In the attempt to enhance students' current perceptions of themselves, it was clear that teachers needed to consider students' prior experiences. The provision of opportunities that allowed students to feel more comfortable and experience success was evident. This had the prospect of generating a change in attitude towards future challenges and enhancing self worth (Brophy, 2004; Humphreys, 2001; Nuthall, 2007). The implications as to how teachers structured learning tasks to include diverse learners, including students with poor self worth, is addressed in depth in the discussion related to the teacher strategies theme.

## **Summary**

It was clear that characteristics of good and poor self worth could easily be distinguished in the learning environment. There were a wide range of physical, social, emotional and behavioural characteristics and attitudes that represent good self worth and poor self worth. It appeared that good self worth was an advantage in the classroom because it contributed to stronger and more effective social interaction and

enhanced perceived levels of ability. Good self worth seemed to spiral up, whereas there was a spiralling down effect for students starting with poor self worth. For students with poor self worth the classroom or learning environment had the potential to being a very difficult place to be and to grow socially and emotionally. It could be suggested that the manifestation of poor self worth was a barrier to students' progress in the classroom.

## **Research Question 2: Influences of the learning environment on self worth**

The connection between self worth and achievement was discussed with an emphasis on students' attitudes, motivation and avoidance related behaviour. The importance of the interrelated aspects of the teachers' personal and professional qualities was discussed with particular attention to humour, teacher/student interaction and trust. Teaching strategies were discussed in relation to student freedom and responsibility, acknowledgement and praise, recognising needs and feelings, high expectations, avoiding labels, fairness and consistency and the implementation of effective self worth enhancing programmes. The significance of others and their part in enhancing students' self worth was discussed in relation to peers/friends, peer groups and parents. The socio-cultural aspects of the learning environment were discussed with an emphasis on the social aspects of the classroom as a 'community' and the learning environment as a safe place to be, socially, emotionally and physically.

### 3. Achievement

**Similarities in teachers' and students' responses:**

- Three out of four teachers indicated that self worth enhanced achievement but three out of four focus groups of students suggested achievement enhanced self worth.
- Some students cannot manage the pressure of lack of achievement and it can impact on not only their impressions of themselves as learners but of themselves as people. One group of students however acknowledged that some students can manage the pressure and do have the ability to turn a less than positive experience around.

Both teachers and students acknowledged the place of achievement as part of the learning process but they described the relationship between achievement and self worth differently. While teachers believed self worth to be an influential part of achievement students suggested that it was achievement and feelings of success that enhanced self worth. This dichotomy was not unusual and has been referred to as 'a chicken and egg debate' (Beane, 1991), which supported the reciprocal views of self worth and achievement by teachers and students in this study. The majority of teachers' views were consistent with research that suggested students with high self worth learn more and were likely to achieve more than students with low self worth of the same ability (Bandura, 1986; Dweck, 1986; Hipkins, 2005; Humpreys, 2004; Ormrod, 2008). Teachers indicated that feeling strong and good about oneself contributed positively to behaviours associated with achievement in the classroom and suggested the opposite for students who presented with poor self worth:

*'More and more I feel that if you've got a negative framework from which you are working that's probably the biggest thing on your mind which would mean it would detract from your ability to concentrate on anything else and everything that you do would be flavoured with that feeling' (T1).*

This would suggest that teachers believed students with poor self worth not only felt differently to students with good self worth, but connected with the learning environment in different ways. It appeared that a negative undertone that infiltrated the feelings students had about themselves also clouded the 'lens' through which they viewed their classroom and their perceptions of their ability to master learning tasks. It was possible that to students with poor self worth, learning and achievement related requirements could be described as barriers to obtaining good self worth. This was reinforced by evidence in this study that suggested a negative framework could be a significant contributor to poor self worth.

Students described one barrier to student achievement as self doubt, which shared similarities to Bandura's (1986) description of self efficacy. Self doubt had the potential to influence feelings of optimism towards achievement and as Bandura (1986) suggested actual capability of performance. Findings in this study were consistent with Bandura's view (1986) that many students had difficulty in school not because they were incapable of performing successfully, but because they were incapable of believing that they could perform successfully. One teacher said:

*'[Students'] beliefs about themselves impacts on everything around them ... poor sense of self worth impacts on students' motivation and their effort sometimes' (T4).*

Findings associated with perceived ability appeared to be a strong force behind the use of achievement related behaviours. It seems that students' willingness to respond to challenge or maybe even risk could be compromised if perceived competence was low. Brophy (2004) used the term 'failure syndrome' which appeared to encapsulate the idea

of low perceived competence and poor self worth. He suggested the students' fear of failure was linked to prior experiences and he reinforced teachers' views that characteristics such as fear, apprehension, lack of desire and reluctance could be associated with prior experience and poor self worth. With this in mind it highlighted the importance of recognising the place of prior experience on students' perceived competence, ability to achieve and overall self worth. It appeared that if prior experiences had been significantly poor attempts needed to be made to do what Brophy (2004) suggested as re-socialising students into more positive feelings of efficacy. This may be a strategy that has the potential to enhance students' ability to achieve and contribute to the development of overall self worth.

Brophy's (2004) view related to re-socialising was consistent with findings that implied if attempts were not being made to work towards achievement it limited students' chances of feeling successful and opportunities to enhance self worth through feelings of success could be lost. Similarly, students' views were consistent with literature that suggested students with self doubt or low self efficacy found achievement related behaviours such as choice of activity, goal setting, effort, persistence and overall motivation difficult (Bandura, 1986; Humphreys, 2004; Siefert, 2004). A concern was that if teachers were using strategies such as 'activity choice' and 'goal setting' in an effort to enhance students' self worth it may have a less than desired effect for some students.

Findings indicated that under achievement may have forced some students to use avoidance related strategies in an attempt to hide inability (Siefert, 2004). While avoidance as a strategy allowed students to escape the demands of achievement it had implications in that it limited opportunities for students to experience success and consequently enhance self worth. Consistent with Avoidance Theory (Siefert, 2004) were teachers' and students' views that the issue of failure and avoidance was much greater than the experiences students had at school. One teacher suggested feelings of failure and associated poor self worth could lead students to want to avoid school altogether.

*‘When they’re miserable and they’re not happy with who they are and what’s going on and what’s happening they don’t want to come to school, don’t want to be here’ (T3).*

It seemed that feelings of failure and associated poor self worth could be a significant influence on students’ choice of behaviour. Students would choose to avoid learning situations and go to lengths to avoid school altogether if reduced the chance of public failure. These avoidance tactics to help protect self worth, could have led to sustained periods of absence from school. This had the potential of escalating and had significant implication for truancy.

Avoidance, reluctance and a lack of desire could have been perceived by others as not only, characteristics of poor self worth but as limited motivation (Siefert, 2004). Also evident is that this perceived lack of motivation was described by teachers and students as a defence mechanism used by students to ensure their level of under achievement was not obvious to others. This aligns with findings that when students did achieve and felt good about themselves, they exhibit behaviours that could be described as characteristics of a highly motivated person, such as ‘always talking and putting hand up’ and ‘being ready for action’. This supported findings by Bandura (1986) and Ryan and Deci (2004) that suggested students who were ‘self’ or ‘intrinsically’ motivated tended to develop enhanced feelings of competence and perceived ability to achieve. The New Zealand Ministry of Education had recognised self motivation and the development of a ‘can-do’ attitude as important in the *NZC* (2007). These attributes had been identified as part of the key competency ‘Managing Self’, and had been acknowledged as characteristics of lifelong learning. This reinforced the emphasis placed on enhancing students’ perceived ability to achieve and overall self worth.

Findings also suggested that some students were able to manage the pressures of a lack of achievement. Students suggested that in some cases students had the ability to turn a less successful experience around. One student said:

*'If I'm not good at something I aim higher, I go home and I study really hard so I can reach it.'* (FG1).

It appeared that this particular student exhibited strong self worth and a degree of resilience that allowed him or her to look beyond the initial result to what was possible in the future. Not only did this student appear to have strong self efficacy (Bandura, 1986) but demonstrated an ability to take positive action in working towards achieving.

On the other hand there was evidence that some students were not able to manage the pressure of a 'lack of achievement'. It could be suggested therefore that an emphasis on achievement might, for some students, be motivational but it raised learning and self worth related issues for less able students. Teachers' comments related to contextual learning; all other teachers interviewed believed that the way students felt about themselves and their abilities could depend on the subject or context. One teacher said:

*'A lot of sporting guys think they can't do the academic side of things ... yeah it depends on where their strengths lie.'* (T4).

There was consistency between teachers' views and those of Crocker and Park (2004) who suggested success in one area, or context of learning, can lead to increased feelings of success and confidence in other areas. Three of the four teachers referred to this in relation to physical education and team sports. One teacher described a group of very confident boys who played rugby competitively but who struggled with writing:

*'... they've [students] got that other area already where they've seen they can achieve and its well hey you're really good at this, I'm sure you can transfer those skills to another area.'* (T3).

Findings indicated that teachers recognised the need to use a variety of learning contexts and pedagogical approaches with the view to enhancing further success/achievement and self worth. Another teacher described how a touch tournament had enhanced the leadership skills of some children, and for one boy in particular, it had changed his

attitude and approach to learning in the classroom and motivated him to take on leadership roles within the school:

*‘... there’s a touch tournament we’ve been doing at the moment, we’ve got coaches, refs and sort of team leaders ... I’ve got one [boy] who’s hated doing any written work whatsoever but since we’ve been doing this sports together he’s been taking a big leading role in sport, he’s on the student council and he’s been doing my drink selling at lunch time ... when you see them succeed in physical education and team sport you start to see it perpetuate through the classroom and often classroom behaviour as well.’(T3)*

It could be suggested that this student’s success and the development of leadership skills were enhanced by his experiences in the Sport Education unit of work. It was also evident that his self worth was enhanced when provided with the opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills of which he perceived himself to be good. The Sport Education Model (as cited in Hellison & Templin, 1991) was recognised as a valuable and educative pedagogical approach used in the physical education learning area (Hellison and Templin, 1991; Metzler, 2005; Siedentop, 1986) because it was learner-centred and provided students with opportunities for more responsibility/agency. Teachers had recognised that for many of their students, the use of effective physical education and sport related pedagogies such as the Sport Education Model (as cited in Hellison & Templin, 1991) provided opportunities for engagement, achievement and improved self worth. Additionally teachers supported the place of physical education as a valued learning area in the NZC (2007) reinforced by the view that many students engaged in learning and achievement related behaviours in a learning area they connected with and felt confident in.

The new Government driven initiatives to implement national standards for reading, writing and mathematics in all New Zealand primary schools by 2012 has implications for the ongoing implementation of the balanced curriculum. The value and emphasis placed on learning areas that do not fall under a target orientated framework could be



diminished. It is possible that schools will feel pressured to place an emphasis on reading, writing and mathematics in an attempt to ensure the school meets national targets in a competitive climate that this kind of framework may create. The National Standards (MOE, 2010) represent a notable change of focus in terms of education policy and could have implications for students' learning (New Zealand Educational Institute, 2009) and self worth. Although the *NZC* (2007) states that all New Zealand students 'should receive a rich and balanced education' (p.37), and encourages schools to draw on variety, there is potential for this to sit at odds with the Government's implementation of the National Standards (MOE, 2010).

Implications for enhancing self worth through achievement/success appeared positive should students experience success. It was clear however that a lack of achievement/success had the potential to have a negative influence on students' beliefs, attitudes, motivation and learning behaviour. It was also likely that students' behavioural responses to achievement or lack of achievement could manifest in different ways for the purpose of protecting self worth in the public environment of the classroom. Evidence suggested that a greater understanding of students' responses to achievement related tasks could allow teachers to implement more effective self worth enhancing opportunities for students. It was also evident that an emphasis on enhancing students self efficacy had the potential to improve motivation towards learning, achievement and self worth.

The implementation of a variety of teaching and learning approaches has the potential to enhance self worth in the learning environment. Specific approaches are discussed in more depth in the theme related to teaching strategies. Providing learning opportunities from a variety of contexts enhances the chance of initial student engagement socially, emotionally and academically. This reinforces the need to provide students with an education through a balanced curriculum where the implementation of learning opportunities from all learning areas within the *NZC* (2007) is valued. This in turn has implications for pre-service teacher education and prompts the need to maintain a vision that drives teacher education from a humanistic philosophical position.

## 4. Teachers' qualities

### **Similarities and differences in teachers' and students' responses:**

- Teachers and students described the importance of positive teacher/student relationships.
- The majority of teachers and students emphasised the importance of the teachers' ability to demonstrate a good sense of humour.
- The majority of student focus groups emphasised the importance of trust in teachers/student relationships.
- Teachers indicated some understanding of how the hidden messages associated with teachers' practice can influence students' self worth.
- Teachers and students emphasised the need to make an effort to understand students as learners and as people in order to work constructively together.
- Teachers and students commented on the teachers' personal qualities and described how the integration between personal qualities and 'teaching qualities' was important.

Teachers' and students' views were consistent with literature that claims positive teacher/student relationships were a contributing factor to the quality of student learning and subsequently motivation, attitudes towards future learning, and self worth (Beane, 1991; Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Ginott, as cited in MOE, 1999; Hipkins, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2001). Evidence from this study suggested humour, trust, care, support and understanding were teacher qualities that had the potential to influence self

worth. This was consistent with McGee and Fraser (2001) who suggested ‘treating students with respect, being compassionate, having a good sense of humour, acting in a just and fair manner and the ability to be friendly but firm’ were desirable personal teacher qualities (p.68). The study also suggested that these qualities needed to be implemented in a genuine manner with the view to attracting student credibility. Teachers could be seen to be trying too hard and if qualities such as those mentioned above were forced and/or seen by students to be false it would impact on the teachers’ ability to make true, effective and self worth enhancing relationships with students.

## **Humour**

Teachers suggested classrooms could get too serious at times and mentioned ‘humour’ as an important teacher quality. Teachers indicated that being able to see the ‘funny side’ of a situation and/or joke with children when appropriate, contributed to the way students interacted with and responded to their teachers in the learning environment. It appeared that the use of humour could provide a bridging mechanism to enhance the social and emotional connections between teachers and their students. Students related incidents of teasing to humour. One student said:

*‘... our teacher tried keeping a straight face when we were dancing [I said] “are you trying to laugh Mr P” and he’s like no, no its not amusing at all.’ (FG3)*

This could suggest that students felt more connected to their teachers when teachers took the time to joke with them on an individual basis. This supported Skinner and Belmonts’ (as cited in Wigfield & Eccles, 2002) views that when teachers were personally involved with their class, children tended to respect their teachers and experience a sense of belongingness in the classroom therefore influencing self worth. It could be suggested that when teachers demonstrate humour, students find relating to their teachers easier and this appears to enhance self worth. This could be explained more clearly by examining the status teachers could have over students. It may well be that teachers do not intend to exhibit status over their students but it appears that teacher

qualities such as humour can either increase or decrease this perception. It appeared in this case if teachers were able to demonstrate humour in a genuine manner they allowed themselves to relate to students in a way that students perceived as equal.

Implications were that teacher qualities such as humour had the potential of enhancing students' self worth. It was evident that teachers who were able to demonstrate a sense of humour with their students provided an implicit message to students about the way they felt about them as people as well as learners. It appeared to portray a message of a less dominant relationship and in doing so provided students with more confidence about their place in the relationship. Also evident was that teachers needed to balance the quality of humour with other qualities that allow them to manage the class effectively.

## **Trust**

Findings were consistent with Wigfield and Eccles (2002) who suggested the teachers' ability to understand their students was important because it enhanced students' trust in their teachers. According to students, there was a fine line between trusting and not trusting their teachers. Students described situations where they knew teachers were trying to help them but from a student's perspective this help was detrimental. For example, students spoke of incidences where they had confided in their teachers, only to find out that their information had been shared with other staff members. The sharing of student information by teachers might have been seen to be in the best interests of students but it resulted in a loss of trust. The sharing of this kind of supposedly confidential information with other staff members may be seen by teachers as a professional responsibility but by students as gossip and to some degree a betrayal of trust. One student explained:

*'The teachers gossip cause [we] had a fight right and our teacher ended up knowing ... it was so annoying because she'd just gossiped about it and all the teachers knew'* (FG3).

*‘... teachers say you can tell them these personal things but you can’t because they just turn and all the students end up finding out.’ (FG3)*

It was apparent that students were hearing teachers say ‘talk to me’ and they recognised the connections teachers were trying to make with them but they suggested that with one incident, trust could be breached. Students described situations where they could hear teachers talking about other students, and they made assumptions that they could be talking about them. These actions, from a student’s perspective, did not provide students with confidence to talk to their teachers. What was clear was that from a student’s perspective it could be very difficult to rebuild this trust. This example reinforced the dichotomy between the personal and professional role of the teacher and the importance of merging of these roles in creating positive teacher/student relationships and enhancing self worth.

Teachers could see the importance of open communication and the positive effect it has on student/teacher relationships but understood equally the ethical considerations associated with their professional role of the teacher. Wigfield and Eccles (2002) supported this, acknowledging that ‘Listening, asking questions, inquiring if students need help, making sure students understand difficult material, and providing help in non-threatening ways are characteristics of caring teachers’ (p.289).

They suggested students who experienced this type of communication learnt that teachers were effective and trustworthy. This was consistent with comments from both teachers and students in this study. However, in contrast, student/teacher relationships could be affected when this trust is breached. Students in this study suggested that the loss of trust in a particular teacher could lead to a disconnection between students and teachers, overall interest in learning and subsequent behaviours associated with avoidance. Trust appeared to be a very important part of student/teacher relationships and the consequences of misunderstanding this had significant implication for teachers and students.

Trust between teachers and students had the potential to enhance teacher/student relationships and self worth. However, evidence suggested that trust relied on consistent and honest dialogue between teachers and their students to ensure misunderstandings did not occur.

### **Caring and supportive teachers**

Students' comments were consistent with Alton-Lee (2003), Hattie (2008) and Nuthall (2007) in the way they described the need for teachers to form strong and positive connections with them in an attempt to enhance achievement and overall self worth. It was evident that stronger connections between teachers and students were made when teachers provided emotional support and compliments to students. It was also important to students that teachers listened to them and their opinions, and took the time to find out more about their students. Teachers could make an explicit effort to provide students with support and complimentary comment. However, it was fundamental to effective practice that teachers were able to work towards refining 'rich' qualities to maintain genuine connections with students, for example, sensitivity, respect and care.

Caring and support requires a greater understanding of the role of both teachers and students. Wigfield and Eccles (2002) identified some characteristics that defined the 'caring teacher', but it was evident that teachers needed to demonstrate transparent communication. This was consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008) who recognised the relationship between teachers and students as both intimate and objective, suggesting a fine-tuned balance between the affective characteristics of the student/teacher relationship and the reciprocal nature of the relationships that require an interplay of transparent communication, trust, empathy and challenge were required (p.8). This was supported by Noddings (1995, 2001) who described the need for an 'ethic of care' in and through teachers/student relationships and teacher practice.

Implications were that teachers who demonstrated characteristics of care and support were more likely to form stronger relationships with students and influence self worth. It was apparent that in enhancing qualities of care and support teacher/student

relationships needed to be open and honest with the view to growing transparency between teachers and students from both teachers' and students' perspectives.

### **Teachers understanding students**

Students acknowledged a genuine need to be recognised by their teachers as intelligent capable young individuals and it appeared that students did not always feel like their teachers understood them in this way. While teachers suggested they did try to understand their students, this understanding was created from a teacher's perspective. It became apparent that connections between teachers and students and the influence of these connections on self worth could be greatly enhanced if teachers were able to gain understanding about their students from a student's perspective (Nuthall, 2007). Nuthall (2007) provided an appropriate framework for learning about and understanding students which was based on his belief that students operate in the classroom within the context of three different and interacting worlds; public, semi-private and private. He suggested that trying to understand the student from one world could amount to a narrow and unrealistic view of the student. This could have limitations on the development of teacher/student relationships in what is a socio-cultural learning environment where students may build and construct understanding in very different ways to that of teachers. This one sided understanding may also have the potential of appearing dominant and less inclusive to students.

Teachers' and students' views were consistent with Brookfield (1995) and Nuthall (2007) who suggested an underlying position that the relationships teachers had with students could have status over their students. This could be unwittingly and unintentionally evident to students. Teachers suggested they were aware that there were hidden messages associated with teaching practice, but admitted that they were unaware of some of the messages inherent in their own practice. The unintentional power relationships between teachers and their students could potentially impact on the development of fair and equitable professional working relationships between teachers and students (Brookfield, 1995; Nuthall, 2007; Windschitl, 2002). Brookfield (1995)

suggested that teachers needed to be aware of the influence they had in the classroom and the implications this had for the relationships they developed with their students.

It was evident that teachers had the potential to be strong socialising agents in the classroom environment and needed to examine their behaviours carefully using formal reflection processes. This was reinforced by Brookfield (1995), Nuthall (2007) and Windschitl (2002) who described the need for a more critical approach to teacher reflection. They outlined processes to develop more effective teacher reflection strategies that may enhance the position of the teacher and overall influence on students' and self worth. The Critical Reflection Process (Brookfield, 1995) ensured teachers examined the planned and unplanned messages associated with their practice and critically analysed the effects of these interactions on students self worth. Reflecting in this way, teachers could understand and make changes to the way they interacted with students and their practice (Brookfield, 1995; Windschitl, 2002). This had implications on teacher education, with the view to ensuring teachers were equipped with the skills to be critically reflective practitioners.

While there had been an emphasis on the teachers' ability to be more critically reflective with the view to enhancing teacher/student relationships it was also acknowledged that students could be more responsible in contributing to professional relationships. Teachers who grew strong and equitable relationships with students were more likely to enhance students' ability to be more responsible. Emerging was the need to ensure students learnt how to manage interactions with others, developed skills to enhance interaction with others and developed understanding about interactions with others (MOE, 2007). The *NZC* (2007) provided a framework for enhancing learning relationships. There were five underlying competencies in the *NZC* (2007) of which three relate explicitly to the development of relationships and developing strong connections through learning. Key competencies such as 'Managing Self', 'Relating to Others' and 'Participating and Contributing', were underpinned by the development of explicit social and emotional skills relating to self, others and within groups (communities/society). It was clear that strong, positive and equitable teacher/student relationships contributed to the abilities of students and teachers to work cooperatively



and constructively together (Hattie, 2009; Nuthall, 2007) and if teacher/student relationships were positive, self worth is more likely to be enhanced.

Implications are that strategies such as critical reflection (Brookfield, 1995; Windschitl, 2002) that allowed teachers to be more aware about students, from a student's perspective, are more likely to enhance teacher/student relationships. The use of critical reflection strategies provided teachers with information about themselves that allowed them to develop qualities that are more likely to enhance genuine and honest relationships and are empowering students to take some responsibility for the professional relationships they built with their teachers. This kind of interaction had the potential to enhance teacher/student relationships and provided a strong basis for enhancing self worth.

## **5. Teachers' strategies**

### **Similarities in teachers' and students' responses:**

- Emphasised the importance of an emotionally and socially safe learning environment.
- Described the importance of the identification of students' needs and teachers monitoring students' feelings.
- Discussed the need to encourage students. However teachers felt like they were encouraging students when they encouraged them to put themselves forward whereas students described the impact of the lack of teacher encouragement.
- Described the importance of fairness and equity.

- Described the importance of freedom and/or choice but perceived the benefits to be different. Teachers said giving student freedom and/or choice related to leadership opportunities while students suggested freedom was a sign that they were trusted by their teacher.
- Described praise but teachers suggested that students responded differently to various kinds of praise and various kinds of praise were either effective or ineffective. Students suggested that praise can be overdone but they felt like teachers wanted to praise them.
- Described the use of rewards and incentives as a strategy for enhancing the learning environment.
- Suggested that ‘self’ related programmes implemented at the beginning of the school year had the potential to influence self worth if they were personalised for students by relating to strengths, needs and goals.
- Suggested self worth enhancing elements embedded into the learning and learning environment were more effective than isolated self worth enhancing programmes.

Teaching strategies associated with the social and emotional safety of the learning environment had been recognised by teachers and students as self worth enhancing. This section begins by discussing how social and emotional safety within the learning environment enhances students’ self worth and follows with discussion related to how teaching strategies such as recognising individuals needs, goal setting, praise/encouragement, fairness and consistency and freedom and choice which influence students’ self worth within the social and emotional learning environment. It was this theme associated with teachers’ strategies that provided the strongest synergy between teachers’ and students’ perceptions of what influenced students’ self worth.

### **Socially and emotionally safe learning environment**

Findings supported the view that a positive social, emotional and ethical learning environment, had the potential to enhance self worth (Cohen, 1999; Elias, 2003; Hipkins, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). Evident in this study, was that the learning environment was not inseparable from the people that work within it. This study recognised the dialectical relationships between the learning environment and the people and strategies used to enhance self worth. However, it also identified how a number of aspects shaped the social, emotional and ethical aspects of the learning environment and influenced students' self worth.

Teachers reinforced the importance of a safe environment suggesting self worth could be enhanced if social and emotional characteristics of the learning environment were nurtured. Teachers' views of a safe learning environment were consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008) who recognised the importance of challenge in the classroom and the provision for students to feel like they could fail in a safe environment and turn it into a learning experience. The importance teachers appeared to place on social and emotional needs of students supported views in favour of social, emotional and ethical learning indicating that the schools' role should be holistic and all encompassing when considering the educational needs of students (Adelman & Taylor, as cited in Zins *et al*; 2004; Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007; Packer & Goicoechea, as cited in Hipkins, 2005). The humanistic positioning underpinning social, emotional and ethical learning theory supported the view that the purpose of schools should be focussed on the 'production of people' (Adelman & Taylor, as cited in Zins *et al*, 2004; Packer & Coicoechea, as cited in Hipkins, 2005). This was in opposition to the institutional view (Kunc, 1992) that suggested personal and social needs would be met outside the classroom and academic achievement and classroom management would be prioritised.

Teachers also suggested that the social learning environment was influenced by the dynamics between teachers and their students. While teacher/student relationships have been discussed in depth in a separate section of this study it is necessary to acknowledge the place of relationships in the development of effective learning environments.

The views of both teachers and students in this study were consistent with the work of Alton-Lee (as cited in BES, 2003) who identified relationships and group cohesion as an underlying component of a successful learning environment. She acknowledged the need to use class sessions to value diversity and to build community and cohesion.

Similarly, Watkins (2005) reinforced the concept of the community as part of the classroom learning environment. Much of his work related to the use of the term 'community' as part of the larger idea of 'learning communities'. Of particular interest to this study was the aspect relating to 'belonging'. Teachers' and students' understanding that a sense of belonging enhances self worth was consistent with Alton-Lee (as cited in BES, 2003)) and Osterman (2000), who reinforced concepts such as 'caring' and 'connectedness' as important elements of an effective learning environment and components of enhancing students' self worth.

Teachers suggested the social, emotional and ethical aspects of the learning environment could be enhanced if learning was recognised as a process as opposed to a product. Literature suggested that when learning is focussed on the product, it limits opportunities to learn through the process itself. This creates a competitive environment on focussing on completing the task or producing the product (Brophy, 2004; Wigfield & Eccles, 2001). Brophy (2004) and Wigfield & Eccles (2001) suggested that creating this kind of environment heightens chances of self worth related issues and can promote disengagement and avoidance as self worth protection mechanisms (Brophy, 2004; Siefert, 2004). Cohen (1999) and Elias (1997, 2003) reinforced the use of social and emotional learning strategies as effective pedagogical approaches for enhancing self worth and supported Hofmann Nemiroff's (1992) views that 'education should be people-centred and process-centred' (p.36).

Implications for classroom practice were that a positive learning environment could have significant implication for students' self worth especially if there was a genuine emphasis on social, emotional and ethical aspects of the environment. It appeared that enhancing the belonging aspect of classroom community was had the potential of enhancing self worth (Alton-Lee, 2003; Elias, 2003; Osterman, 2000; Watkins, 2005).

Pedagogical approaches such as Guided Discovery, Divergent Learning (Mosston, 1896) and Cooperative Learning that provided for interaction and recognise individuals' contributions had the potential to influence students' feelings of safety and belonging in their learning environment (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000) and subsequently influence self worth. It was suggested that explicit pedagogical approaches needed to be implemented, and then reflected on to ensure learning opportunities related to influencing self worth were meaningful, educational and provide students with a sense of belonging.

Creating an environment that provided students with opportunities to be pro-actively involved in their learning process had the potential to influence feelings of self worth (MOE, 2007; Watkins, 2005). This was reinforced by the philosophical underpinnings of the *NZC* (2007) where the need for students to understand and acquire the skills related to learning and developing effective relationships was evident. Examples were reflected in the key competencies (*NZC*, 2007) related to 'Participating and Contributing' and 'Relating to Others' (as mentioned previously) and Critical Thinking. These competencies reinforced the need for students to take an active role in their learning and to develop the skills to be both pro-active and critically reflective about their place within their learning environment/community.

### **Identification of individual students' needs**

The identification of individual students' needs was recognised as a self worth enhancing strategy by both teachers and students. One teacher acknowledged the value in being able to identify 'balance' for her students indicating that it was important to be able to meet the needs of students emotionally as well as academically. The synthesis of these dimensions to learning has been acknowledged as foundational to good practice (Alton-Lee, 2003; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). The need to recognise these dimensions as mutual was reinforced in the *BES* (2003) through a statement that suggested 'caring and affective practices alone were insufficient to create an environment that supported the learning of diverse students' (p. 23). Another teacher reinforced the importance of identifying each child's needs stating;

*'I like to think that I really look at the kids as individual rather than a group of bright kids, the group of sporty kids ... you know let them go and do what they need to do and give them opportunities to show their strengths and show what they're good at.'* (T2).

Findings suggested that providing for students as individuals was recognised as an important part of the teaching and learning process but it was also evident in comments such as the one above that there could be a tendency for teachers to group students based on their assumptions about the kind of students they appeared to be. While teachers were able to articulate how they would implement teaching strategies that would meet individuals' needs they were not always sure they were doing this in practice. One teacher said:

*'It's something you hear all the time, you know work from the kids' own experiences, work from their own knowledge, but how often do we actually consciously think about how we're going to do that for each individual? .... I'm thinking of those boys now, how their writing is very limited and they really lack ideas but maybe if I said to them to write about how they felt about winning the race...' (T1).*

It was not that teachers had forgotten how to meet the needs of individuals in the classroom, but it was clear that they were almost pre-occupied with simply 'getting by'. While meeting the needs of individuals was very important to these teachers, it was evident that the rigorous demands of the classroom impacted on practice. Finding the time to meet individual needs was more of an issue than teacher knowledge. This is one area which warrants further investigation.

Students' and teachers' views were consistent with earlier research that acknowledged the value in teachers taking the time to get to know students as individuals and consequently providing for their needs (Alton-Lee, 2003, McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). A group of students suggested that teachers who used strategies to identify what students needed or wanted were more likely to enhance students' self

worth. Teachers also recognised the importance in trying to understand individual students' feelings associated with learning with the view to enhancing self worth. One teacher said;

*'You have to monitor [students'] feelings and behaviours at the start of the school day and [this can normally] be gauged by just saying "Hi! How are you?" (T4).*

There was some consistency between teachers' comments and Brookfield (1995), McGee and Fraser (2008) and Nuthall, (2007) who believed self worth was more likely to be enhanced if teachers understood how individuals were experiencing learning including their feelings associated with learning. Without this information teachers could only make an assumption that students would enjoy and/or learn through the experiences provided. This information was almost essential in ensuring students gained from their learning experiences, and in doing so enhanced lifelong learning skills and felt good about their learning experiences.

It was also apparent that understanding students required strong teacher/student relationships where truthful, honest and genuine discussions could take place. This allowed for further and perhaps deeper conversation between students and their teachers (Hattie, 2009; Nuthall, 2007) and according to findings in this study had the potential to enhance self worth. Findings suggested that the strategies used by teachers were stronger, seen by students as more genuine and possibly more empowering when blended with the teacher qualities outlined in the previous chapter such as care, support and understanding. This was a critical point for this study as it reinforced the importance of the teacher's role in the teaching and learning process, and the dialectical relationship between the teacher's personal qualities and the teaching strategies they employed to enhance self worth in the learning environment.

There was consistency between teachers' views and those of McGee and Fraser (2008). McGee and Fraser (2008) believed teachers had a greater chance of understanding students needs if they made meaningful and relevant connections between what students

do outside school, and the tasks they were asked to do while at school. Potential this could enhance student's confidence towards learning and self worth (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007). This supported Nuthall's (2007) belief, already discussed, that students live their lives in the classroom through three different but interacting worlds. Of relevance was what Nuthall (2007) described as the child's 'private world', where they experienced self belief and self worth, and individual thinking and learning took place, using connections between the students' lives at home and their lives at school. For teachers to make effective connections between students' home lives and their school lives, strategies that allowed teachers to get to know students more personally appeared to be required. It was important to remember that not all home experiences were positive for students, and the need to look to other experiences such as sporting or cultural activities was necessary.

Teachers reflected on the need to avoid labelling students and instead make their own judgements of students as individuals. One teacher said:

*'It's really important as a teacher that you don't take labels from someone else that had them last year or from you know [the student's] brother ... sometimes I see kids who have been labelled not as themselves but through a family member and it carries on through [their school life] and they never get rid of it.'* (T3).

Teachers felt that it was too easy to label a student, or a group of students, as 'sporty' or 'arty', as opposed to the skills they did or did not possess. It was evident that labelling students could have a detrimental effect on self worth as it was either belittling students or imposed pressure on students to perform or achieve for example performing as well in sport as an older brother or sister. This was supported by Nuthall (2007) who suggested there was a need for the teacher to demonstrate 'sensitivity' especially if they were trying to change what students thought or believed about themselves. Teachers could benefit from exploring strategies that allowed them to show sensitivity towards their students and demonstrate that they acknowledged them as individuals in their own right.



Easily confused however was the difference between labelling students and giving students a nickname which, as suggested by students, was welcomed and seen as a personal acknowledgement that impacted positively on self worth. With this in mind it seemed necessary to provide students with some understanding about the teaching strategies used by teachers. This could be accomplished through more open discussion between teachers and their students allowing them to recognise the differences in their understanding and the chance to develop more transparent communication. This was consistent with Nuthall (2007) who stated, 'One of the greatest enemies of effective teaching is miscommunication' (p.24).

Implications of identifying individual students' needs had the potential of improving self worth. It appeared that students felt valued by their teachers when they were recognised as individuals, and feeling valued appeared to make students feel better about themselves. However, from a teacher's perspective, the process of identifying individual needs was generally based on enhancing the learning process and included how students felt about learning. Students did not always view their interactions with their teachers as learning related, and felt that their individual needs were being met or at least acknowledged through simple and often very small interactions with their teachers. This could imply a small difference in teachers' and students' expectations of what 'meeting individual needs' meant in the classroom.

### **Goal setting**

Goal setting was seen by teachers and students as a self worth enhancing strategy because it helped teachers recognise individual needs and provided a more personalised focus for students. Students suggested goal setting gave them a feeling of recognition and individuality. While teachers agreed, they also suggested that goal setting provided students with a personal learning related benchmark and believed this had the potential to enhance self worth. Teachers' views were consistent with Crocker and Park (2003) and Siefert (2004) who reinforced the place of learning goals, as opposed to performance related goals, as a positive framework for students' learning and enhancing self worth. Findings indicated that strategies such as learning related goal setting

provided students with more ownership of their learning and with it the right to question their own learning. This process had the potential to be more emancipating, empowering and more intrinsically motivating for students (Hacker and Bol, as cited in McNerney & Van Etten, 2005; Nuthall, 2007; Ormrod, 2008).

There were similarities between teachers' when commenting on student ownership. Teachers suggested that providing opportunities for students to be able to justify the decisions they made, and level to which they achieved, was important as it had the potential for enhancing the way students felt about their learning. Teachers saw value in encouraging students to set and monitor their own learning related goals but this was not to be confused with behaviour related goals, as teachers appeared to want to maintain more direction and perhaps control in this area. There were similarities between teachers' views and those of Hacker and Bol (as cited in McNerney and Van Etten, 2005), Hattie (2009) and Ormrod (2008) who suggested strategies that allowed students to consciously monitor and regulate their knowledge, cognitive processes and affective state had the potential to impact on higher academic goal setting, more effective learning and greater levels of achievement. This was seen to have the potential for enhancing self worth. Only one of the three teachers described how he explicitly teaches students the required strategies for effective goal setting. Fundamental to students' learning how to set and work towards their own goals is their understanding about where they were before they began, where they were going and what it looked like when they got there (Hattie, 2009).

Teaching strategies that allowed teachers to facilitate more student-owned and student-centred learning were more likely to enhance self worth. However, student-centred learning approaches could have provided a challenge for teachers who have been used to direct styles of teaching. Student-centred learning approaches required a change in pedagogical understanding which is attainable. This would be greatly enhanced with a further philosophical shift in understanding associated with teaching and learning but may prove to be difficult.

Implications for enhancing self worth are that strategies such as goal setting have the potential to enhance self worth. Teachers needed to provide students with the teaching and learning element for goal setting with the view to ensuring the process is effective in producing higher levels of learning, autonomy and self regulation and contributing positively to students' self worth (Hattie, 2009). The use of goal setting strategies can be enhanced if teachers are more aware of the kinds of goal setting that can be employed, and demonstrate understanding of the implications for students' motivation and self worth when these strategies are implemented in classrooms. However, it is important to ensure that classroom discourse accommodates learner-centred strategies, such as individualised goal setting (Alexander, 2003; Hattie, 2009; Nuthall, 2007).

### **Programmes**

Both teachers and students suggested self worth enhancing programmes were more likely to enhance self worth if they were embedded into the whole school experience. There were similarities between teachers' and students' comments and the critique of self worth enhancing programmes of the 1980s where programmes specifically designed to enhance self worth were 'bought and taught' to children in schools as isolated packages of information (Beane, 1991; Goleman, 1995; Haksell, 2001; Hipkins, 2005; Shulman, 1997; Stout, 2000).

Teachers and students suggested that programmes related to individual students' strengths and needs could provide a positive platform for the beginning of the school year and a foundation which could enhance self worth. Their views were consistent with Haksell (2001) and Hipkins (2005) who reinforced the need to make strong connections between contextual learning and other aspects of school life.

Implications are that self worth is more likely to be enhanced if the teaching and learning initiatives are authentically contextualised within classroom and school culture. Approaches to enhancing self worth needed to be underpinned by the school's philosophical framework and both implicitly and explicitly built into classroom/school practice (Beane, 1991; Goleman, 1995; Hipkins, 2005; MOE, 2007). The *NZC* (2007)

provides an example of how the philosophical underpinnings build programmes that are connected to the curriculum, the whole school learning environment and are linked to supportive school communities. Underlying concepts such as, 'Hauora' and 'Attitudes and Values', are embedded into the conceptual framework of the Health and Physical Education learning area of the NZC (2007). The concept of 'Hauora' was described as multidimensional because it encompassed the social, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of health (Ministry of Education, 1999). As an underlying concept 'Hauora' is an inherent part of all Health and Physical Education learning activities. This inherent framework ensures a more coherent programme for enhancing self worth and provides a basis for purposeful and meaningful learning opportunities.

### **Praise and encouragement**

Common words or phrases that emerged from the data and appeared to be associated with praise were 'encouragement' and 'acknowledgement', of which feedback seemed to be overriding. Both teachers and students supported Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) in recognising encouragement and praise were rich components of the feedback process which, if implemented effectively, could have a positive influence on self worth. Teachers' views were also similar to Burnett (2002) and Brophy (2004) who suggested praise and encouragement were important components in enhancing teacher/student relationships and self worth. While the importance of relationships had been discussed in the previous chapter, it had also been mentioned as part of teachers' strategies because it reinforced the dialectical relationship between teaching strategies and the manner in which teaching strategies were implemented by teachers.

Teachers appeared to understand the positive effect that encouragement had on students' self worth and were aware that encouragement could be delivered in various forms (Brophy, 2004; Hattie & Timperley, 2007).

One teacher suggested encouragement could be delivered through a change of teacher expectation:

*'You don't even have to say 'fantastic work' or whatever. It's that suddenly you treat them differently and you do that subconsciously because suddenly your expectation of that child is slightly different.'*(T3).

It was clear that for this teacher a change of expectation was a form of encouragement. This is consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008) who suggest the teacher's non-verbal communication was a particularly powerful influence on students' self worth as children were more sensitive to non-verbal cues. The difficulty with non-verbal communication was that it could be very easily misinterpreted and students may not recognise the teachers' change in attitude or behaviour as encouragement. Teachers felt, for example, that they were encouraging students when they guided students to put themselves forward to experience something new, but this was not necessarily how students felt. Students described the importance of positive compliments and encouragement but were more descriptive about how the lack of encouragement could impact negatively on students' self worth. This reinforced Burnett's view (2002) that students' perceptions of their classroom, their learning and more importantly themselves increased when they were provided with encouragement in the form of ability and effort feedback.

Students were also critical about praise, suggesting it can be overdone and produce a negative outcome. Students' views are consistent with Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) who acknowledge the fine line between productive and unproductive praise. Students suggested praise must be genuine and purposeful, and less specific comments, such as 'well done', were too generic and to a point, meaningless. Students' views supported Scott, Murray, Mertens and Dustin (2001) who reinforced the place of constructive praise with the view to enhancing self worth.

Teachers' and students' comments were consistent with Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) who suggested that too much praise could produce a negative response from students and could have a negative effect on students' self worth. Teachers referred to the ritual of giving certificates out in assembly suggesting that sometimes this became a compulsory event where students expected their name to come up at some stage. They felt that some students developed an attitude that they did not have to earn the award because eventually it would simply be their turn to receive a reward. Students' comments however revealed that they preferred to have to work for their rewards. One group of students said:

*'Teachers need to make you feel like they want to praise you, like don't just say well done ... only praise if [students have] actually done something really good and don't praise for the sake of it.'* (FG4).

Some of the structures used to praise or reward students were becoming too 'fair' or perhaps losing the element of personal competition that seemed to drive students. Students who were supposedly interested in being rewarded were becoming complacent and unmotivated. This was consistent with Stout's (2000) critique of the 'feel-good curriculum' where expectations to succeed were suppressed and that feeling good about oneself was more important than achieving.

Teachers' and students' views were consistent with literature that suggested feedback including praise should be a consequence of performance and should provide information about the students' performance rather than the effort (Burnett, 2001; Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Hattie, 2002; McGee & Fraser, 2008). This was reinforced by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2001) who stated 'Specific constructive feedback about learning, as it is occurring, is one of the most powerful influences on student achievement' (p.2).

It was evident that the potential outcome of praise in the form of specific feedback was significant, but teachers acknowledged that getting it right for individual students in the classroom environment was difficult, and not often managed well by teachers. While it

seems straight forward, it appeared that there was a fine line between the correct level of praise and encouragement right. Findings indicated that it was worth attempting to perfect the way praise and encouragement were delivered, and provided clearer guidelines and challenges for the design and implementation of classroom and school based reward systems.

Findings supported the work of Clark, Timperly and Hattie (2001) and Thompson (1997) who suggested that students respond differently to certain kinds of praise. Teachers indicated, for example, that ‘public praise’, such as a comment to a student in front of other students, could impact negatively. Teachers believed that some students were already labelled as ‘bright’ and did not want to gain further negative attention for that. Teachers’ views were similar to Burnett (2001) who suggested that an alternative to ‘public praise’ was a quiet word or a comment written in a book. Teachers’ views were consistent with Owen (1997), who suggested younger groups of students responded very well to ‘open praise’, but this kind of praise could be seen as embarrassing by Year 7/8 boys in particular, because of the desire to feel socially accepted. This represented a dialectical relationship between the teachers strategies associated with praise/encouragement are also influenced by the socio-cultural nature of peer group culture.

Findings associated with public praise were both supported and opposed by Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) who acknowledged that public praise related to achievement was appropriate because it reinforced the learning intentions and could be informative, however, public praise could also be humiliating and embarrassing. Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) supported teachers’ views in this study that boys could be more embarrassed by public praise. They suggested that boys would be more likely to sabotage a public occasion as an avoidance strategy. Similarly, Ames (cited in Clarke, Timperley & Hattie, 2001) suggested that public celebrations that acknowledged effort, and in some cases personal achievement, could lead to issues with progress and self worth. The need to ensure, that the use of public praise was well founded and suitably monitored was evident.

Implications for enhancing self worth through praise and encouragement are high but appear to rely on the teacher's ability to administer praise and encouragement effectively and reflectively in a diverse classroom setting. Findings indicated that teachers' and students' understandings of praise and encouragement differed and it was evident that this lack of consistency between teachers' and students' understandings could be misunderstood and have a negative effect on students' self worth. If Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) were suggesting that encouragement or formative feedback provided a basis for developing positive teacher/student relationships and enhancing self worth, greater transparency between teachers' and students' understanding of encouragement was necessary. While teachers needed to take responsibility for enhancing their knowledge about administering praise and encouragement it was clear that greater student understanding would enhance consistency between teachers' and students' understanding. The need to provide opportunities for older students to learn to take more responsibility was evident.

Clark, Timperley and Hattie (2001) provided a framework for raising students' self worth through formative assessment, inclusive of encouragement and praise. It was clear that underpinning this framework is a student or learner-centred discourse where students are encouraged to self mark and self evaluate their performances against the learning outcomes. This provided opportunities for students to gain personal understanding of their achievement and, as with the benefits of personal goal setting discussed previously, allows for the growth of autonomy, responsibility, personal encouragement and agency. While it was clear that teachers were the most powerful influence in the classroom (Hattie, 2009) and therefore their encouragement and praise carried significant weight, it was also evident that students' personal input had the potential to complement the teacher's role.

### **Rewards and incentives**

Teachers appeared to align themselves with humanistic thinking, recognising the place of preventative management approaches that enhanced the social and emotional aspects of the learning environment, as opposed to strategies that enforced rigidity and control



underpinning academic performance. All teachers described various incentive strategies but one in particular described a positive classroom incentive programme that was also reinforced with a positive school management programme:

*'I've got on my board and area where I've got the heading commendable students and if their name goes up there then they can win house points...also a similar system runs through the school where they get tickets if they're spotted in the playground for anything positive and they can get a ticket in the lucky box for a draw at assembly and they can then select a prize.'* (T1).

This kind of management strategy was clearly underpinned with an humanistic approach as students were responsible for choosing to behave in a way that was conducive to receiving a reward. Student responsibility appeared to be a consistent theme underpinning both teachers' and students' comments. One teacher described how senior students were expected to take on the responsibility of looking after younger students. They were expected to model appropriate social behaviour in the playground with the purpose of helping and encouraging younger students. It seemed that this approach was planned with the intention of eliminating inappropriate playground behaviour. This pro-active approach was in contrast to reactive approaches that would be more heavily laden with interventions and behaviour management strategies imposed by teachers and principals. The pro-active approach was obviously more positive and had the potential to enhance students' self worth. However this approach does rely on a supportive school climate, education for older students relating to their role and *supportive*, as opposed to *controlling*, input by teachers.

Osterman (2000) who believed providing opportunities for students to work together, consequently responsibility, was necessary in creating a community where students felt safe, accepted and connected, and had the potential to enhance self worth (Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000; Sewell, 2006; Watkins, 2005). This was supported by students who acknowledged how self worth could be enhanced when they are provided with opportunities to work alongside younger students. This has been discussed in more

detail in the section entitled ‘Significant Others’. Teachers’ and students’ views were again underpinned with socio-cultural theory that recognised the way other people influenced the learning environment and how this influence had the potential to enhance self worth.

### **Fairness and consistency**

It appeared that degrees of fairness and consistency impacted on students’ self worth. Teachers’ and students’ comments were consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008), and Nuthall (2007), who indicated that the teacher’s ability to demonstrate fairness and consistency were significant components of effective teaching, including the development of self worth, of this age group in particular. Teachers acknowledged the strong sense of social justice that 12/13 year old students had and recognised the need for the implementation of fair and just approaches to classroom management and the use of effective teaching strategies that enhanced self worth.

Teachers explained how important it was to provide students with explanations as to why particular decisions were made in the classroom. They said:

*‘Fairness is hugely, hugely important at this age group. If you explain what’s going on, what’s happening, why you are doing what you are doing, why this punishment is being given out, they [students] will just agree with you, we [teachers] don’t have problems’ (T3).*

Students’ views of fairness, or what was seen to be unfair, were largely underpinned by misunderstandings between teachers and students. The strategies used by teachers to manage misunderstandings had the potential to influence students’ self worth. Students described situations where they were unfairly blamed for incidents. They felt teachers needed to provide opportunities for students to explain their side of the story with the purpose of minimising misunderstandings between teachers and their students. Students’ views were consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008), Moltzen (as cited in McGee & Fraser, 2008) and Nuthall (2007) who supported a more student-orientated

approach to managing incidents of social justice within their learning environment. It seemed necessary to ensure students were provided with what they saw as fair input when discussing such incidences with teachers, especially when considering the development of self worth.

The need to think beyond incidents related to management, and work towards employing strategies related to fairness within the teaching and learning process, is important. If the same kind of strategies could be employed within classroom practice it may limit the need to react to as many incidents of management. Brookfield (2008) described value in the implementation of democratic discourse within the classroom environment. He suggested that an amalgamation of student voice and teachers' experience provides for a strong foundation on which to build and maintain a democratic classroom. This meant that elements of fairness and consistency were not only considered but were fundamental as they underpinned the discourse.

Implications are that students' self worth can be enhanced if teachers used teaching strategies and classroom practice that allows for student voice and student lead interaction. It appeared that such strategies had the potential to provide for greater consistency between teachers' and students' understanding and in doing so enhanced students' feelings of self worth (Brookfield, 2008; Moltzen, as cited in McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Sewell, 2006). The manner in which strategies are implemented and the degree of teachers' sincerity underpins the use of chosen strategies is important.

### **Students' freedom and choice**

Findings were consistent with Nuthall (2007) and Osterman (2000) who suggested pedagogical approaches that allowed for student choice and freedom could have a positive influence on feelings of self perception and overall self worth. This study supports learner-centred approaches to teaching and learning where students were provided with opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning; this appeared to enhance feelings of choice and freedom (Nuthall, 2007). However, teachers and

students viewed freedom differently. Students were quite sure that teachers who allowed choice and/or freedom were teachers that trusted their students. While students appeared to enjoy choice and/or freedom in the classroom, it was clear that the 'teacher trust' associated with choice and/or freedom was valued more. Unless teachers were communicating, or were in a position to observe their students, there was concern that these important connections were not being made.

Teachers explained the need to provide leadership opportunities for their students and did so to ensure they were encouraging students to put themselves forward. Teachers' reasoning was sound and positive but there was a distinct difference between teachers' and students' understandings. Teachers did not make any connection to, and did not appear to understand, the importance students placed on the feelings of choice and freedom. This provided a good example of the importance of Nuthall's (2007) work on how teachers understand students, and trying to view students from a student's perspective. Once again it was evident that consistency between teacher and student understanding was necessary.

Implications are that self worth may be enhanced if teachers provided students with more choice and freedom. It was clear however that both teachers' and students would benefit from discussing the value of learning experiences that provided students' with choice and freedom. Teacher knowledge and understanding indicated that they had the ability to implement teaching strategies that were more emancipatory and empowering, and this provided a perfect opportunity to develop stronger relationships with students. If this was not recognised it could be viewed as a lost opportunity and reinforced once again the importance of understanding students from a student's perspective (Nuthall, 2007).

Self worth may be enhanced if teachers understand and implement teaching strategies that challenge teachers and students' personal understandings. Teaching strategies that empowered students to discover, challenge, discuss and at times disagree had the potential to enhance understanding between teachers and their students and had the potential to influence the way students felt about their learning experiences (Bandura,

1986; Ennis, 2000; McGee and Fraser, 2008; Moltzen, as cited in McGee & Fraser, 2008; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Nuthall, 2007).

This teaching strategies theme was the largest and most divergent of the six discussion themes in this study. For this reason it seemed important to provide an overall summary that draws the discussion points of this theme together. The overall implication of the teaching strategies theme was that the teacher's choice of teaching approach and skill in implementation could impact positively on the social and emotional aspects of the learning environment and contribute to enhancing self worth. Findings suggested that pedagogical approaches more likely to influence aspects of the social and emotional learning environment and enhance self worth were learner-centred or self-directed. An example was Mosston's (1986) landmark spectrum of teaching styles that had the potential of promoting self worth through the development of cognitive, social, emotional, physical and moral dimensions of learning. It appeared that learner-centred or self-directed approaches could provide students with more opportunity to take responsibility, learn to interact with others and enhance feelings of perceived freedom and choice (McGee & Fraser, 2008). It seemed that pedagogical approaches with a learner-centred focus could be more empowering (Nuthall, 2007; Osterman, 2000) with the prospect of enhancing feelings of intrinsic motivation. The social nature of learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches also provided a platform for enhancing social skills and feelings of connectedness with the view to enhancing self worth.

It seemed that constructivist pedagogical approaches supported the development of the social and emotional learning environment and were consistent with growing a sense of community and feelings of belonging in an attempt to enhance self worth (McGee & Fraser, 2008; Watkins, 2005). The learner-centred or self-directed aspects of constructivist pedagogical approaches could provide the teacher with more of a facilitatory role which could open up opportunities for observation. If teachers could take these opportunities where they can learn more about their students from a student's perspective (Nuthall, 2007) it may contribute to enhancing understanding between teachers and students and influencing the community aspects of the learning environment.

## 6. Significant others

### **Similarities and differences in teachers and students' responses:**

- Teachers and students described the importance of parents' support. Teachers suggested that parental support was necessary and emphasised the significance of lack of support.
- Teachers and students described positive interactions between peers. Students described parents as positive role models.
- While acknowledging positive interactions with peers students also provided insight into the negative aspect of peer relationships.
- Students described the positive influence of sports coaches, friends and other family members.

This theme related to 'significant others' has been recognised as important because the significance of others, while outside school, appeared to influence students' self worth in the learning environment. It was evident that students arrived at school with varying degrees of self worth, some of which was influenced by the significant other people in their lives. These varying degrees of self worth appeared to have some influence on the increase, or decrease, of self worth in the learning environment, and reinforced the need to recognise the influence of significant others.

When asked to discuss how other people influenced self worth it was students who dominated this theme with their comments, the depth of their comments and identification of the variety of people that they believed influenced self worth. All four of the student focus groups commented on the positive and/or negative influence of

other people on students' self worth. Similarities between teachers' and students' comments related to the influence of parents/caregivers and of students' peers and peer groups. Students described the positive influence of sports coaches and friends. While the above will form the basis of this discussion it is important to note that it is likely that there were many other significant people in the lives of students who contributed to enhancing self worth.

### **Parents/caregivers**

Students described the significance of parents/caregivers as role models, and suggested they were people they could look up to because they were organised, hard working, and they spent time with their children. One teacher described her memories of her own father as a role model and she suggested that there were certain attributes he had that meant she looked up to him as a role model. She acknowledged that she valued her father's views and it appeared that effective role models enhanced self worth. Findings were consistent with Biddulph, Biddulph & Biddulph (2003) and Higgins (2003) who described the influence of parents on students' self worth. Higgins (2003) suggested parents were the first major influence to shape the sense of the individual's self. In recognition of this, it was important to note teachers suggested some parents could have a negative influence, and as a result there could be negative outcomes on students' self worth and learning (Higgins, 2003).

One teacher described a negative incident that occurred at home that had implications for the student's learning and self worth at school. She said:

*'I've got a very visual artistic sort of child and home's not that flash but he knows when he can come here like he'll come in quite early some mornings and start drawing and doing some of those sort of things that he likes doing.....just allow him to do that sort of thing .... I think at home we've had the drawings ripped up and all sorts so ..... ' (T4).*

In this case the school environment, and the context of drawing, appeared to make this student feel good enough about themselves to want to come to school early. Nuthall (2007) reinforced students' and teachers' views suggesting there could be strong support networks at home. However, it was evident in comments such as this, that parents were not always able to provide effective support networks at home which could limit the development of good self worth. This was consistent with Wigfield and Eccles (2001) who suggested students who do not have strong support networks and experience insecure relationships tend to enter situations such as school with feelings of detachment or high levels of emotional stress. Findings in this study indicated that students who appeared to have poor self worth exhibited these kinds of characteristics. Similarly, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962) reinforced the significance of the student's sense of security and belonging on the development of self worth and achievement. The outcome of strong relationships with parents and caregivers on students' self worth highlighted, once again, the influence of the socio-cultural context of the learning environment and the benefits of working collaboratively with people in and out of the school environment (Bandura, 1986; Brophy, 2004; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007).

Findings suggested that teachers made every attempt to connect with students' home environments in the hope that this would contribute to enhancing parent/teacher relationships. Unfortunately, for this age group, the links between school and home were more often initiated when an incident occurred, as opposed to general and ongoing communication, which is often implemented in the junior school. The other difficulties suggested by McGee and Fraser (2008) was that parental involvement in school activity appeared to be on a decline. While the perceived hierarchy between teachers and parents' has diminished over time, elements of the last generation's perceptions of teacher status have remained and left some parents with limited confidence to approach their children's teachers. Findings suggested that genuine, ongoing communication between parents and teachers was necessary and the need to ensure that this communication was not seen as negative by parents and students may aid in the success of communication and the strengthening of students' self worth (Alton-Lee, 2003, McGee & Fraser, 2008). This reinforced the inclusive approach to schooling where



parent input was valued and to some degree nurtured which is in contrast to a more exclusive approach where it was believed that teachers were solely responsible for the education of students while they were at school.

Implications are that students' self worth can be enhanced through strong relationships with their parents and caregivers. It would be worth an extended study to investigate how the relationship between parents/caregivers and their children can be developed with a view to enhancing self worth. What was apparent was that building and maintaining strong connections between teachers and parents had the potential to enhance students' self worth. While it was recognised that teachers needed to initiate connections between themselves and parents ,strategies that allowed parents, to feel like they were an important part of their children's education were more likely to enhance their willingness and confidence to maintain connections.

### **Peer relationships and friendships**

Findings suggested that peer relationships had strong potential to influence students' feelings and behaviours related to self worth. While peer acceptance proved to be important, friendships were still an overriding influence on good self worth, as suggested by the Sullivan Theory (as cited in Bishop & Inderbritzen, 1995). While teachers suggested friendships and peer relationships influenced self worth students indicated that classrooms were made up of different groups of peers and interaction between these groups of peers could have a negative influence on self worth. One student said:

*'There's the group of high achievers and [we] don't feel like we want to hang around with them because we don't feel like we belong and we don't have the same attitude.'* (FG1).

It seemed that students' friendships and interactions with other peers were seen by students as different. Students indicated that friends were people that could be trusted and would do their best to be supportive, while peer interactions could be with anyone

in the classroom and did not necessarily contribute to good self worth. This was consistent with literature that suggested peer relationships and/or friendships were different to 'peer group culture' and each had the potential to influence students' self worth in different ways (Hattie, 2002; Rubin, Coplan, Chen & Buskirk, 2005; Wentzel & Caldwell, 1997). Peer group culture is discussed in more depth later in this theme.

Teachers' and students' recognition that positive student friendships and peer relationships could enhance self worth was consistent with current literature (Alton-Lee, as cited in BES, 2003; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Townsend & McWhirther, 2005;). Nuthall (2007) and Parker and Gottman (as cited in Rubin *et al*, 2005) suggested that while positive student friendships had been linked to good self worth, friendships were dynamic and may not always be positive. This was evident in students' comments related to the fluidity of student friendships. One student talked about an ex-girlfriend and it was clear that the end to this relationship impacted on the friendship, and to some degree the student's self worth. While it was acknowledged that the importance of peer and friendship relationships changed across various age groups (Parker & Gottman, as cited in Rubin *et al*, 2005) it was clear that these relationships had the potential to influence self worth in some degree throughout the student's time at school.

While students indicated that friendships had the potential to enhance self worth they were just as descriptive about enemies who teased and made them feel left out. Teachers noticed students who appeared to be left out acknowledging that students with poor self worth were often lonely and preferred to work on their own. It was also evident that students who feared public exclusion would use avoidance related strategies such as 'personal withdrawal' from social situations to protect their self worth.

Implications are that friendships and peer relationships are likely to consistently enhance self worth. This reinforced the need to ensure students made strong friendships with at least one main friend. The alternative was that those who did not make friendships tended to compensate by withdrawing from or avoiding social situations. Students' views were consistent with Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) who suggested students without friends tended to report less positive perceptions of self

worth than students who described positive relationships with peers. Concern was that students who tended to work on their own did not get the chance to improve their relationship skills and benefit from positive interaction. Hymel *et al* (1990) suggested that students who withdrew from social situations early in their schooling experience tended to show signs of anxiety, fearfulness, and solitary behaviours. This was supported by students and teachers who suggested that fear and anxiety were characteristics of someone with poor self worth. This proved to be a vicious circle as teachers and students had indicated that students who showed signs of poor self worth such as preferring to work alone, loneliness and anxiety were not as easy to befriend. This was reinforced by a student who said:

*'Most people don't include people who don't feel good about themselves.'* (FG1).

This is similar to teachers' views. One teacher said:

*'[Students with poor self worth] are not keen to be part of a team and they're the last people to be picked [for a team]'* (T3).

It became apparent that with the view to enhancing self worth there was a real need to ensure students had every opportunity to develop positive student relationships. It was also evident that the process of developing positive relationships required understanding of how relationships worked and students needed opportunities to develop these skills.

It was also evident that students recognised two different but quite distinct groups of students in the classroom. They described their friendships but they also discussed the influence of groups of peers. While they did not use the language associated with peer culture, they appeared to mean something similar. Findings suggested that some peer groups seem to have inherent power over other students which appeared to dominate the way students chose to behave in the classroom. This was consistent with literature that suggested peer culture could be a strong socialising influence over students especially when the need for students to feel socially accepted by their peers was strong (Gifford-

Brownell, 2003; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Rubin, Coplan, Chen & Buskirk, 2005).

The need to feel socially accepted was reinforced by students who acknowledged that some students changed the way they were to ensure they 'fitted in'. Students acknowledged that sometimes these behaviours changed in ways that were not necessarily appropriate but were prepared to behave in this way in order to feel accepted and valued by their peers. One student said:

*'There's this one person who doesn't feel good about themselves but they try to feel good about themselves ... they show off and look all pretty ... because they're trying to fit in.'* (FG4).

Students would make decisions about the way they were going to behave, over and above the way they knew they should behave, to ensure inclusion and feelings of acceptance by their peers. This was consistent with Nuthall (2007) and Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) who reinforced the strong need for students to feel accepted by their peers suggesting this acceptance had the potential to enhance students' self worth.

The strong need to feel accepted by peers was evident in students' comments related to feeling pressured. One student described how peer pressure changed people from being normal or being themselves. Students' views were consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008) who suggested that peer culture could make students feel pressured. They suggested that peer group structure in the classroom replicates societal structure where power relationships, hierarchies and subcultures appeared to control social interaction therefore causing students to feel 'socially pressured' to be, as students suggested, 'someone they were not'.

Hierarchical peer relationships within the classroom learning environment were evident and these hierarchies formed powerful sub-groups of students who appeared to drive classroom culture. Unfortunately for some students, social pressure negatively influences the development of good self worth. Teachers suggested that peer culture

could be a positive influence on some students' self worth, in some cases. This could be explained by the fact that students were immersed in the peer culture and were more likely to see and experience negative interactions. Teachers generally viewed this culture alongside their students and may have missed some of the negative interaction (Nuthall, 2007). Nuthall (2007) suggested that much of what students learn, including learning about themselves as people, comes from peer culture. It was apparent that a lot more interaction between teachers and their students was required to ensure teachers fully understood how students' self worth was influenced by their peers. Students' views were consistent with Nuthall (2007) who believed teachers needed to become more involved in peer culture with the view to helping students manage the way they feel about themselves in their learning environment.

Implications are that peer culture can influence students' self worth in a positive and a negative way. There is a strong possibility that students could experience the negative influence of peer culture some time during their schooling, and this has the potential to impact on the development of good self worth. McGee and Fraser (2008) acknowledged that while students could not be expected to build and maintain positive friendships with every other student they could be taught to co-exist in peaceful ways. To enhance students' self worth, teachers may need to capitalise on positive peer culture to enhance social relationships and learning experiences in the classroom. Teachers also need to gain a good understanding of the peer culture in the classroom to ensure they operate in a manner that works *with* peer culture rather than *opposed* to it.

### **Sport coaches**

Coaches who developed strong connections with their athletes/students had more potential of enhancing students' self worth (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2009; Hipkins, 2005; Townsend & McWhirther, 2005). Cassidy, Jones and Potrac (2009) suggested that developing strong connections could be enhanced through intrinsic coach characteristics such as honesty, trustworthiness and sensitivity and this was consistent with students' views. These characteristics were not dissimilar to those of teachers who enhance self worth, but the difference appeared to be that sports coaches were also

influential, and who also replicated self worth enhancing characteristics outside of the classroom. This appeared to be another way of reinforcing students' self worth.

While findings suggested a similarity in the teachers' and coaches' abilities to enhance self worth, it was important to acknowledge the difference between the role of the sports coach compared to the role of the classroom teacher and/or parents/caregivers. The difference was that students chose to be involved in their sport. They began their relationship with their sports coaches by choice and in a different way to that of their parents or their teachers. It was important to acknowledge this difference as it could present a bias in results. However, it does provide some insight into how connections made with different people in students lives such as teachers, parents and coaches can complement each other. This combination of support could provide greater self worth enhancing opportunities for students.

While comments associated with positive connections with sport coaches tended to come from students who appeared to have good self worth, it was important to note that strong connections with significant adults had also been recognised as 'a possible remedy' for low self worth (Scott, Murray, Mertens and Dustin, 2001). This reinforced the place of sport coaches, and the need to provide students with opportunities to participate in sport and interact with sport coaches with the view to making connections and enhancing self worth.

Students were confident about their ability as talented and skilled sports people but interestingly when describing their coaches they did not mention their coaches' sporting related skills. It was clear that students admired the qualities in their coaches that allowed them to connect with their students in a genuine way. According to students, it was this additional support and education related to their beliefs about themselves as athletes, that appeared to be most influential to the development of self worth. This was reinforced by one student who said:

*'My coach rings me up ... he gives me a talk before a game ... he says good things and he came to my Canterbury game.'* (FG1).

It was apparent that coaches showed an interest in their students as people as well as being athletes and recognised the value in educating young people through sport. This was consistent with research suggesting that sport could be a context for learning about the self and could provide relevant opportunities for learning about, and practising, life skills (Cassidy, Jones & Potrac, 2009; Culpan, 2000; Cushion, 2006; Kidman, 2005; NZOC, 2000). This reinforced the importance of the physical education learning area in the *NZC* (2007) and the opportunities it provides for students to learn through movement and sporting related contexts. Cassidy, Jones and Potrac (2009) suggested coaches who adopted a more holistic approach to coaching enabled them to consider their athletes/students as human beings and, in the process, enhance self worth. This was in contrast to the technocratic approach to teaching and coaching sport which favoured the physical performance and accomplishment, over and above the emotional and social qualities of the athlete or student. The connection between the positive experiences these students were having with coaches in a sporting environment outside school, and the influence on self worth in the learning environment is also recognised. This could suggest that involvement with significant people outside school could contribute to the development of good self worth in the learning environment.

The influence of various people such as teachers, friends/peers, peer groups, coaches and parents/caregivers it was evident that connections formed, or not formed, with people were a contributing influence on self worth (Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007; Townsend and McWhirther, 2005). The impact of relationships on individuals was an important part of this study and it was evident that self worth and learning were embedded in and around what Hipkins (2005) described as a complex web of relationships. This complexity was described by Nuthall (2007) as multilayered as the interactions students have with other people were varied in many ways. The importance of particular people, at various times in students' lives differed, but each had their place and were layered to form a complex social network. Clearly relationships were formed in and out of the student's school experience, but had the potential to be of some influence on self worth in the learning environment (Nuthall, 2007).

Implications for classroom practice related to the educational value placed on forming effective relationships with the view to enhancing self worth. The implementation of pedagogical approaches, including socio-critical approaches, could be used by teachers in an attempt to reinforce explicit teaching about relationships. Approaches designed to provide opportunities for students to work together were required as was the simultaneous implementation of critical thinking and action models which had the potential to provide for richer and more realistic learning experiences. Enhancing students' understanding about the socio-cultural context of the learning environment and their ability to be more reflective about the positive and negative implications of relationships in and out of school had the potential to enhance self worth. The Health and Physical Education Learning Area of the *NZC* (2007) provided an example of how educative concepts associated with relationships could be examined from a socio-critical perspective. Students were provided with opportunities to explore relationships in relation to themselves, others and society with an emphasis on identity, sensitivity and respect and they were provided with opportunities to learn to use inter-personal skills to enhance relationships (MOE, 1999).

## **Summary**

The second part of this chapter related to teachers' and students' perspectives of how self worth was influenced in the learning environment it was clear that it was not one single element that was most influential. Instead a complex and dialectically related group of themes appeared to underpin the development of students' self worth in the learning environment.



## **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

The aim of this study was to investigate teachers' and students' understandings of how self worth was influenced in the learning environment. In an attempt to answer the research questions similarities and differences between teachers' and students' understandings were investigated.

Six main themes evolved out of this study: two themes illustrated the characteristics of good self worth and poor self worth; four themes were identified as fundamental to the development of students' self worth in the learning environment. These themes were derived from the analysis of the interviews and provided a basis for identifying implications for classroom practice. It was these themes, and associated implications for classroom practice, that shaped this concluding chapter.

Recognising the socio-cultural characteristics of the learning environment and the blending of these characteristics underpinned findings in this study, suggested that self worth was influenced in the learning environment in many different ways.

### **Answering the research questions**

#### **Research Question 1: How do teachers and students describe good self worth and poor self worth?**

This study found that the characteristics of either good self worth or poor self worth were obvious to teachers and students in the learning environment. Similar to that of earlier research it was evident that students who presented with good self worth appeared to be advantaged personally, socially and academically in the learning environment (Hofmann, Nemiroff, 1992; Hutley & Eskeles-Gottfried, 2008; Pajaries & Schunk, 2001).

Students who presented with good self worth appeared to exhibit strong perceptions of their ability to achieve which, as Bandura (1986) suggested, contributed to actual ability to achieve. Similar to earlier research, this study found that students presenting with good self worth did not only achieve, but exhibited positive achievement related behaviour such as striving, taking risks and persisting with difficult tasks (Hutley & Eskeles-Gottfried, 2008; Hipkins, 2005; Pajaries, 2002). Students with good self worth seemed to find the learning environment more of a positive place to be as their attitudes and behaviours associated with achievement were continually reinforced in and by the learning environment.

This study also suggested that good self worth had the potential to contribute to stronger and more effective social interaction with teachers and friends and appeared to provide students with greater confidence to manage the influence and pressure of peer group culture within the learning environment (Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007; Ormrod, 2008).

It was evident that students who presented with poor self worth were more likely to find the learning environment a difficult place to be, and tended to spend most of their time trying to avoid social and academic interaction for fear of public failure. This was common to findings in earlier research (Bandura, 1986; Brophy, 2004; Farmer, 2001; Siefert, 2004). Acts of avoidance appeared to be a conscious decision by students and this seemed to be escalated by the presence of peers and the public elements of the learning environment. However, it was also clear that ongoing avoidance related behaviour had the potential to become habitual. Habits of avoidance could lead to bouts of school absence with the long term implication being the potential for truancy.

Students who avoided situations in which they had a fear of failing, seemed to achieve their goals in protecting self worth in the short term but in doing so denied themselves the chance of experiencing success and gaining associated feelings of confidence, competence and subsequently improving self worth. As suggested in Chapter Four, poor self worth and associated avoidance related behaviour could be derived from negative prior experiences that students brought with them to the classroom (Brophy, 2004). With this in mind, findings suggested that poor self worth could be a barrier to

students overall progress in the classroom as learners and, as Farmer (2001) suggested, as people developing all round skills.

There is a need to provide students with opportunities to confront the barriers related to underachievement with the view to generating change in attitude and behaviour associated with poor self worth. Changing attitudes and behaviour could be seen as necessary teacher practice (Brophy, 2004; Humphreys, 2001; Nuthall, 2007) but also emphasises the ethical responsibility teachers have to enhance students' self worth in the learning environment.

### **Research question 2: From a teachers and students' perspectives how is self worth influenced in the learning environment?**

Similar to a large body of other research this study found a relationship between students' self worth and student achievement (Bean, 1991; Crocker & Park, 2004; Hipkins, 2005; Zins, as cited in Ragazzina, Resnick, O'Brien & Weissberg, 2003; Zins, Weissberg, Wang & Wang, 2004). It was evident that the relationship between self worth and achievement identified in this study supported Beane's view (1991) that they operate in a reciprocal manner, where each have some degree of influence over the other. In supporting the reciprocal nature of self worth and achievement, this study suggested that an holistic approach to meeting students' needs was more likely to have a positive influence on self worth in the learning environment. An emphasis on social, emotional and academic learning appeared to be more accommodating of the multidimensionality of students' learning and meeting needs holistically (Cohen, 1999, Elias, 2003, Nuthall, 2007).

Providing for the holistic needs of students through social, emotional and academic approaches to learning is supported by the vision of the *NZC (2007)*. The curriculum is underpinned with an humanistic philosophy that reinforces the growth and holistic development of students (Cave, 2008, Farmer, 2001, MOE, 2007). Findings share similarities to the philosophy of the *NZC (2007)* which emphasises the need to educate the whole child with the view to maximising opportunities to influence self worth (Adelman & Taylor, as cited in Bloodworth et al, 2004; Packer & Goicoechea, as cited

in Rubin et al, 2005, MOE, 2007). With the view to enhancing self worth and achievement findings suggested the need to ensure social, emotional and academic aspects of learning remained a valued part of the philosophical and epistemological framework of education in New Zealand schools.

The emphasis many students placed on achievement and the relationship they made between success and self worth reinforced earlier research that suggested there was a need to focus on learning as a *process* as opposed to *product or outcome* (Brophy, 2004; Hofmann Nemiroff, 1992; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). In examining the relationship between self worth and achievement, it was evident that there were a number of influences that impacted on achievement related behaviour, such as; perceptions of ability, confidence, motivation to achieve and knowledge of how to achieve. This study suggested that learning as a process provided students with more opportunity to understand their part in the learning process and develop skills related to learning such as self efficacy, intrinsic motivation, self regulated learning and goal setting.

This supported a humanistic position that the school's role should be holistic and all-encompassing of the educational needs of students (Hipkins, 2005; Nuthall, 2007), inclusive of enhancing student responsibility towards learning. It became apparent that if schools work towards the more holistic goal of 'producing people' (Adelman & Taylor, as cited in Bloodworth et al, 2004; Cave, 2008; Farmer, 2001; Packer & Goicoechea, as cited in Rubin et al, 2005) they were more likely to enhance the learning process for students and improve achievement and self worth.

Similar to that of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1962), it was feelings of safety and belonging that appeared to enhance students' self worth in the learning environment. Findings suggested these feelings were fundamental to the development of good self worth and the ability to achieve. This study supported the view that the learning environment was not inseparable from the people that work within it (Adelman & Taylor, as cited in Bloodworth et al, 2004; Nuthall, 2007; Packer & Goicoechea, as cited in Rubin et al, 2005) and reinforced the responsibility of the teacher in providing a learning environment that promoted students' feelings of safety and belonging. In the

attempt to provide an environment where students felt safe and felt like they belonged teachers needed to be careful they did not over compensate for students and in doing so create a sense of dependency between students and teachers. This had the potential to reinforce a teacher/student hierarchy (Brookfield, 1995; Nuthall, 2007; Windschitl, 2002) which was not conducive to growing students' feelings of responsibility and creating an environment where students felt emotionally safe.

Findings supported the 'community approach' in establishing an emotionally safe and effective classroom learning environment (Alton-Lee, 2003; Watkins, 2005) where group cohesion, democracy, equity, emancipation and empowerment were recognised as elements that had the potential to enhance feelings of safety and belonging (Watkins, 2005). Feelings of safety and belonging appeared to be conducive to enhancing learning as a process although the need to ensure students understood how to operate in such a learning environment especially one that provided them with opportunities to take more responsibility was evident. The teaching and learning associated with 'how to be' in this kind of learning environment was recognised as necessary in ensuring students gained from the opportunities provided and self worth was enhanced.

Positive teacher/student relationships were identified in this study as a strong contributor to students' self worth. Findings suggested positive teacher/student relationships could be one of the most important elements of quality teaching and learning because of the influence these relationships had on self worth and achievement (Clark, Timperley & Hattie, 2001; Ginott, as cited in MOE, 1999; Hipkins, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2008). This study provided further insight into what constituted a positive teacher/student relationship which was more likely to enhance self worth. There were a number of characteristics recognised by both teachers and students, such as trust, compassion, humour, understanding and support, and it was evident that these characteristics that they all form part of what Noddings (1995, 2001) described as an ethic of care. The need for teachers to be able to represent an ethic of care in a genuine and honest manner was strongly represented in this study. It was evident that the genuine and honest nature of the teachers approach to 'care' directly impacted on students' connections with their teachers. Forming and maintaining strong connections

with students was also recognised as influential on the development of good self worth and fundamental to the positive and holistic development of the learner.

In an attempt to enhance connections between teachers and students, teachers needed to be aware of the inferred status they had as a teacher and the effect of this status on the way students interacted with them. Findings suggested a more critical approach to teacher reflection would allow teachers to explore how teaching and learning decisions such as pedagogical choice, behaviour management, praise and feedback impacted on their relationships with students and how these relationships influenced self worth (Brookfield, 1995; Nuthall, 2007; Windschitl, 2002). In recognising the reciprocal nature and complexity of teacher/student relationships, this study suggested that students would benefit from learning to be more reflective about their part in teacher/student relationships. It was also evident that this applied to the relationships students had with their peers and significant others, such as parents and/or caregivers, other family members and coaches.

Learning to be more reflective about relationships was consistent with the intent of the NZC (2007) that provided an explicit focus on learning to manage and understand interactions students have with others. This became particularly important when acknowledging Nuthall's (2007) work and the similarities to findings in his study that suggested self worth was more likely to be enhanced when students and teachers could work cooperatively and constructively together. Working together in this way could be enhanced through critical reflection strategies that allow students to gain understanding about their relationships with others and the influence of these relationships on their learning and self worth.

This study suggested that the way teachers' and students' perceived some situations differed, creating misunderstandings, and this appeared to be heightened when assumptions about one group or the other were made. Findings shared some similarity to Nuthall's (2007) research that reinforced the need for transparency between teachers and students, ensuring teachers understood students and students understood their teachers. Teacher practice associated with enhancing self worth could be greatly

improved if teachers created opportunities to gain understanding about students' learning from a student's perspective, and reflected on the impact of their teaching on students' learning from a more critical perspective (Brookfield, 1995; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007).

Another outcome of this study suggested that the choices teachers made about pedagogical approaches related to style of delivery and learning contexts had the potential to influence students' self worth. Similar to the work of Nuthall (2007) and Osterman (2000) this study found that the learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches provided students with a greater sense of freedom and choice and appeared to enhance students' feelings of self worth. Findings suggested that the outcomes for students of learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches could be emancipatory and empowering and could provide students with a greater sense of what Watkins (2005) describes as agency in their learning. A sense of agency appeared to be important when considering the development of self worth because it meant students had an element of control in the learning process. This appeared to provide them with some stability and a greater sense of worth in the learning partnership between teachers and students.

As with a large body of previous research, this study found that learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches provided students with opportunities for discovery, challenge, reflection and, ultimately, ownership (Ennis, 2000; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Moltzen, 2005; Mosston & Ashworth, 2002; Nuthall, 2007; Siedentop, 1996). Mosston's (1986) landmark spectrum of teaching styles and Siedentop's Sport Education model (1996) were examples of learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches that had the potential to provide opportunities for student responsibility and ownership of learning. The learner-centred emphasis of these pedagogical approaches meant teachers were able to take more of a facilitator role during class sessions which could provide them with opportunities to gain greater understanding of their students. These teaching approaches had the potential to enhance teachers' and students' understandings of each other which appeared to influence students' feelings of self worth. It was important however to ensure students were provided with teaching and

learning opportunities that enhanced their understanding of the strategies and skills necessary for effective social interaction required in learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches. This is especially necessary with the view to influencing self worth. Findings were consistent with McGee and Fraser (2008), Nuthall (2007) and Osterman (2000) who reinforced the social advantages of learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches. It was found that consistency and commonality between the implementation of pedagogical approaches used in classroom, and school approaches, was necessary for building a community where feelings of connectedness, belonging and self worth could be enhanced. This supported the view that enhancing self worth through learner-centred pedagogical approaches was valid.

Learning contexts, according to findings in this study, had the potential of influencing self worth. Students, who had expertise and felt confident in a particular learning area, appeared to bring confidence in that area to the classroom learning environment. This study suggested that the influence on self worth appeared to be where students were weaker in some areas but got the chance to show their strengths in other areas, which in this study lead to leadership opportunities and improved confidence in learning in general. Learning areas such as physical education, sport, art and literacy were mentioned. The value in providing a variety of learning contexts provided relevance and connections for students to engage in learning (Alton-Lee, 2003, Haksell, 2001; Hipkins, 2005). This emphasises the need to ensure students experience a variety of relevant learning opportunities and contexts with the view to improving perceptions of ability and enhancing positive attitudes, motivation and self worth.

How the six themes have contributed to enhancing students' self worth has been illustrated throughout this study as a discourse of care (Noddings, 2005; McGee & Fraser, 2008; Nuthall, 2007; Wigfield & Eccles, 2002). This study found that a discourse of care required a blending of pastoral care, quality teaching and learning and a safe social and emotional learning environment. It reinforced the interrelationship between these aspects and the immersion of ethical and critical elements into teacher practice. This was consistent with the characteristics of quality teaching outlined in the BES (2003) and this similarity reinforced the need to develop and maintain strong



connections between good self worth and students learning. This study recognised a relationship between good self worth and learning that focussed on educating the ‘whole child’ through a learning environment that recognised and valued equally social, emotional, ethical and academic learning.

## **Opportunities for future research**

While the results of this study cannot be viewed as representative of all teachers and students because it is a case study, this small sample served its purpose. It provided some interesting trends and outcomes associated with how self worth is influenced in the learning environment that could be used as the basis of further research in the area of self worth. When analysing data it was clear that the study was broad and there was room to consider more focused exploration in some areas in the future. For example:

- Learner-centred or self-directed pedagogical approaches appeared to be more likely to enhance self worth. Further exploration into how various learner centred or self directed pedagogical approaches contribute to enhancing self worth is worthy of further investigation.
- Perceived ability appeared to be related to achievement and seemed to influence the way students felt about themselves. Exploring strategies used to raise levels of perceived ability (self efficacy) could be useful.
- Positive teacher/student relationships were acknowledged as an influence on students’ self worth and appeared to be enhanced when teachers tried to understand their students from a student’s perspective. Further exploration of the strategies that allow teachers to gain greater understanding of their students from a student’s perspective would be worthwhile.
- This study suggested that academic success influenced self worth but appeared be related to peer status and social success. Exploring the differences in emphasis students place on academic success as opposed to social success in relation to self worth is worthy of further investigation.

- A larger study may provide the scope to investigate how variables such as socio-economic status, gender and the influence of students' learning difficulties impact on self worth. The range of this kind of study could provide a more generalised outcome to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- This study explored the views of one year group (12/13 year old students) in their final year of a full primary school. A longitudinal study exploring the emotional needs of students over varying stages of their learning journey could provide greater insight into the relevance and importance students place on self worth across various age groups. This would be an interesting study to pursue with the implementation of National Standards in New Zealand schools.

## **Final statement**

This study reinforced how good self worth can make current learning experiences for students in schools positive, and can shape the way students embark on their learning experiences in the future.

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## Appendix 1a: Demographic Information - Students

### Primary Education Research Project

**Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment:  
A New Zealand context**

1. I would like to be interviewed as part of this study

Yes

☐

No

☐

If yes, continue onto Question 2

2. Are you? (please tick one)

Male

☐

Female

☐

3. What is your age? (please write in your age)

4. Have you always attended this school? (please tick one)

Yes

☐

No

☐

5. Do you have older brothers or sisters? (please tick one) Yes ☐

No ☐

6. Do you have younger brothers or sisters? (please tick one) Yes ☐

No ☐

7. What is your nationality? (please write it in)

1. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury, College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.

2. Complaints may be addressed to:

Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.

College of Education, University of Canterbury

Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## Appendix 1b: Demographic Information - Teachers

### Primary Education Research Project

**Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment:**

**A New Zealand context**

1. Are you? (please tick one)

Male

☐

Female

☐

2. What is your age group? (please tick one)

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Under 20

20–30

30–40

40–50

50–60

60+

3. How long have you been teaching?

(please write in the number of years)

4. How many schools have you taught at?

(please write in the number of schools)

5. Have you attended any courses on raising self worth in the learning environment?

(please tick one)

Yes

☐

No

☐

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Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.

College of Education, University of Canterbury

Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## **Appendix 2: Information Letter - Principal**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

[Date]

The Principal  
[Name] Primary School  
[Address]  
CHRISTCHURCH

Dear [Name]

#### **Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand context**

To conclude my study for the Masters of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education, I am completing a research project (thesis) on Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment - in a New Zealand Context. I will be working under the supervision of Ian Culpan, a Principal Lecturer in the School of Secondary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education, and Penni Cushman, a Principal Lecturer in the School Primary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education.

The general aim of the research project is to examine the views that teachers and students have about self worth in the learning environment and to compare and contrast these views. To do this I need access to two schools. I have identified your school as one that I would like to participate in this study. This letter is to seek permission for your school to be involved.

Your school's involvement would include me interviewing a staff member and conducting focus group interviews with students from the staff member's class. The focus groups would consist of 4-5 students. The research will be initiated with a brief demographic survey that can be completed within 5mins, followed by an individual interview with the selected staff member of up to 60mins and a focus group interview for the students which will take 45min – 60mins. A 30min pilot focus group interview will be conducted with each student focus group interview as a practice to ensure the safety of the children and quality of the interview.

The results of the research will be used for ongoing course development in the School of Primary Teacher Education, Bachelor of Teaching and Learning. It is also anticipated that the results will be used in college and conference presentations, as well as in articles to be submitted for publication.

All documentation will be confidential. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessed by myself. It will be disposed of at the completion of the research. Results from the research will be published but all contributions will remain anonymous. A summary of the research will be made available to all participants and a copy will be provided to the Christchurch College of Education. If for any reason the participants wish to withdraw from the research they can and this has been outlined in the letters to the teachers, students and to the students' parents.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me through the contact details provided below. The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to

The Chair  
Ethical Clearance Committee  
Christchurch College of Education  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch  
Ph (03) 3482 059

My supervisor is Ian Culpan from the Christchurch College of Education (ph 03 345 8132) and he can be contacted regarding the project at any time.

Thank you for your support. It is very much appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Jackie Cowan  
Lecturer in Physical Education  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch  
Ph. (03) 345 8134  
Email – [jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz)



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2. Complaints may be addressed to:  
Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.  
College of Education, University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch  
Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## **Appendix 3: Information Letter - Teachers**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

[Date]

The Teacher  
[Name] Primary School  
[Address]  
CHRISTCHURCH

Dear [Name]

#### **Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand context**

To conclude my study for the Masters of Teaching and Learning degree based at the Christchurch College of Education, I am completing a research project (thesis) on Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment - in a New Zealand context. I will be working under the supervision of Ian Culpan, a Principal Lecturer in the School of Secondary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education, and Penni Cushman, a Principal Lecturer in the School Primary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education.

The general aim of the research project is to examine the views that teachers and students have about self worth in the learning environment and to compare and contrast these views.

I would very much like you to be involved in my study. Your name was selected as a staff member of the school to participate in the interview required for this research project. The research will be initiated with a brief demographic survey that can be completed within 5mins, followed by an individual interview of up to 60mins. Your individual interview will be followed up with a focus group interview involving 4-5 students from your class but this will not require your involvement. The students will be randomly selected and their focus group interview will be approx 45min – 60mins in duration. A 30min pilot focus group interview will be conducted with each student focus group interview as a practice to ensure the safety of the children and quality of the interview.

The results of the research will be used for ongoing course development in the School of Primary Teacher Education, Bachelor of Teaching and Learning. It is also anticipated that the results will be used in college and conference presentations, and in articles to be submitted for publication.

All documentation will be confidential. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessed by myself. It will be disposed of at the completion of the research. Results from the research will be published but all contributions will remain anonymous. A summary of the research will be made available to all participants and a copy will be provided to the Christchurch College of Education. If for any reason you or the children wish to withdraw from the research they can and this has been outlined in the letters to the principal, teachers, students and to the students' parents.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me through the contact details provided below. The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to

The Chair  
Ethical Clearance Committee  
Christchurch College of Education  
PO Box 31 065  
Christchurch  
Ph (03) 3482 059

My supervisor is Ian Culpan from the Christchurch College of Education (ph 03 3482 059) and he can be contacted regarding the project at any time.

Thank you for your support. It is very much appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Jackie Cowan  
Lecturer in Physical Education  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch  
Ph. (03) 345 8134  
Email – [jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz)

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2. Complaints may be addressed to:

Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.

College of Education, University of Canterbury

Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## **Appendix 4: Consent Forms - Teachers**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

#### **Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment:**

##### **A New Zealand context**

Jackie Cowan, who is the principal researcher, has requested my participation in a research study. The title of the research is 'Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment': A New Zealand Context'.

The researcher has explained the nature of this research to me, including the purpose of the research and conditions of confidentiality. I understand what will be required of me if I agree to participate.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I may choose to withdraw at any time.

I agree to complete the survey and return it in the sealed envelope provided.

If I have any questions regarding this research project I will speak to Jackie Cowan as the researcher.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

1. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury, College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.
2. Complaints may be addressed to:  
Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.  
College of Education, University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## **Appendix 5: Information Letter – Parents/Guardian**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

[Date]

Participant's Parents/Guardians

[Address]

CHRISTCHURCH

Dear [Name]

**Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand context**

To conclude my study for the Masters of Teaching and Learning degree based at the Christchurch College of Education I am completing a research project (thesis) on teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment - in a New Zealand Context. I will be working under the supervision of Ian Culpan, a Principal Lecturer in the School of Secondary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education, and Penni Cushman, a Principal Lecturer in the School Primary Teacher Education at the Christchurch College of Education.

The general aim of the research project is to examine the views that teachers and students have about self worth in the learning environment and to compare and contrast these views.

I would very much like your child to be involved in my study. Your child's name was randomly selected as a member from the school to participate in the interview required for this research project. The research will be initiated with a brief demographic survey that can be completed within 5mins, followed by a focus group interview of 4-5 students from your child's class. The students have been randomly selected and the focus group interview will be approx 45min – 60mins in duration. A 30min pilot focus group interview will be conducted with each student focus group interview as a practice to ensure the safety of the children and quality of the interview.

The results of the research will be used for ongoing course development in the School of Primary Teacher Education, Bachelor of Teaching and Learning. It is also anticipated that the results will be used in college and conference presentations, and in articles to be submitted for publication.

All documentation will be confidential. Data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet and will only be accessed by myself. It will be disposed of at the completion of the research. Results from the research will be published but all contributions will remain anonymous. A summary of the research will be made available to all participants and a copy will be provided to the Christchurch College of Education. If for any reason your child wishes to withdraw from the research they can and this has been outlined in the letters to the principal, teachers, students and to the student's parents.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study please contact me through the contact details provided below. The Christchurch College of Education Ethics Committee requires that all participants be informed that if they have any complaint concerning the manner in which a research project is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to

The Chair  
Ethical Clearance Committee  
Christchurch College of Education  
PO Box 31 065  
Christchurch  
Ph (03) 3482 059

My supervisor is Ian Culpan from the Christchurch College of Education (ph 03 3482 059) and he can be contacted regarding the project at any time.

Thank you for your support. It is very much appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Jackie Cowan  
Lecturer in Physical Education  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
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College of Education, University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch  
Telephone: (03) 345 8312



## **Appendix 6: Information Letter – Students**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

[Date]

Participant's Parents/Guardians

[Address]

CHRISTCHURCH

Dear [Name]

#### **Teachers' and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand context**

My name is Jackie Cowan and I am a student at the Christchurch College of Education.

One of the things I want to learn about is what Year 8 students think self worth is and what your teacher does that influences self worth in your classroom and school environment. I would like to know what you think so there will be no right or wrong answers. I will be talking to you as part of a group with other members from your class in a 45 minute interview. We will have a practice interview so we can get to know each other. I would also like you to fill out a survey. The survey includes information that may help me find patterns in what you and the other children say.

It is important that I record what you say correctly so I would like to record our interview on audio cassette (tape). No one but my teacher and I will be able to listen to the tapes as they will be kept in a locked cabinet. The things I write down when I listen to the tapes will not have your name on them and will also be kept in a locked cabinet. I am only interested in what children say about self worth so I will not need to keep a record of your name.

Your mother, father or guardian have a letter so they will know what the interview is about and you or your Mother, Father or Guardian are most welcome to talk to me about the interviews or my study. I will be organising a time with your teacher to interview you as part of the group from your class. It will be within class time at your school.

If you do not want to be interviewed just state this on the survey form and return to your teacher in the sealed envelope.

Thank you

Yours sincerely

Jackie Cowan  
Lecturer in Physical Education  
School of Sciences and Physical Education  
College of Education  
University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800  
Christchurch  
Ph. (03) 345 8134  
Email – [jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz](mailto:jackie.cowan@canterbury.ac.nz)

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College of Education, University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## **Appendix 7: Consent Forms – Parents/Guardians and Students**

### **Primary Education Research Project**

**Teachers’ and students’ understandings of self worth in the learning environment:  
A New Zealand context**

#### **Consent form for parents/guardians**

Jackie Cowan, who is the principal researcher, has requested my child’s participation in a research study. The title of the research is ‘Teachers and students’ understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand Context’.

The researcher has explained the nature of this research to me, including the purpose of the research and conditions of confidentiality. I understand what will be required of my child if he/she agrees to participate.

I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and he/she may choose to withdraw at any time.

I agree to ensure my child completes the survey and returns it to the principal in the sealed envelope provided.

If I have any questions regarding this research project I will speak to Jackie Cowan.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

## Consent form for students

Jackie Cowan is the researcher and she has requested my participation in a research study. The title of the research is 'Teachers and students' understandings of self worth in the learning environment: A New Zealand Context'.

I have read the information given to me and understand what the research is about.

I agree to talk to the researcher.

I understand that I can change my mind about taking part in this research and no one will mind.

I agree to complete the survey and return it to the principal in the sealed envelope provided.

I understand that during the discussion I do not have to answer questions that make me feel uncomfortable.

I am happy for the discussion to be taped.

I know that if I have any questions I can ask my parents/guardians or the researcher, Jackie Cowan.

**Name** \_\_\_\_\_

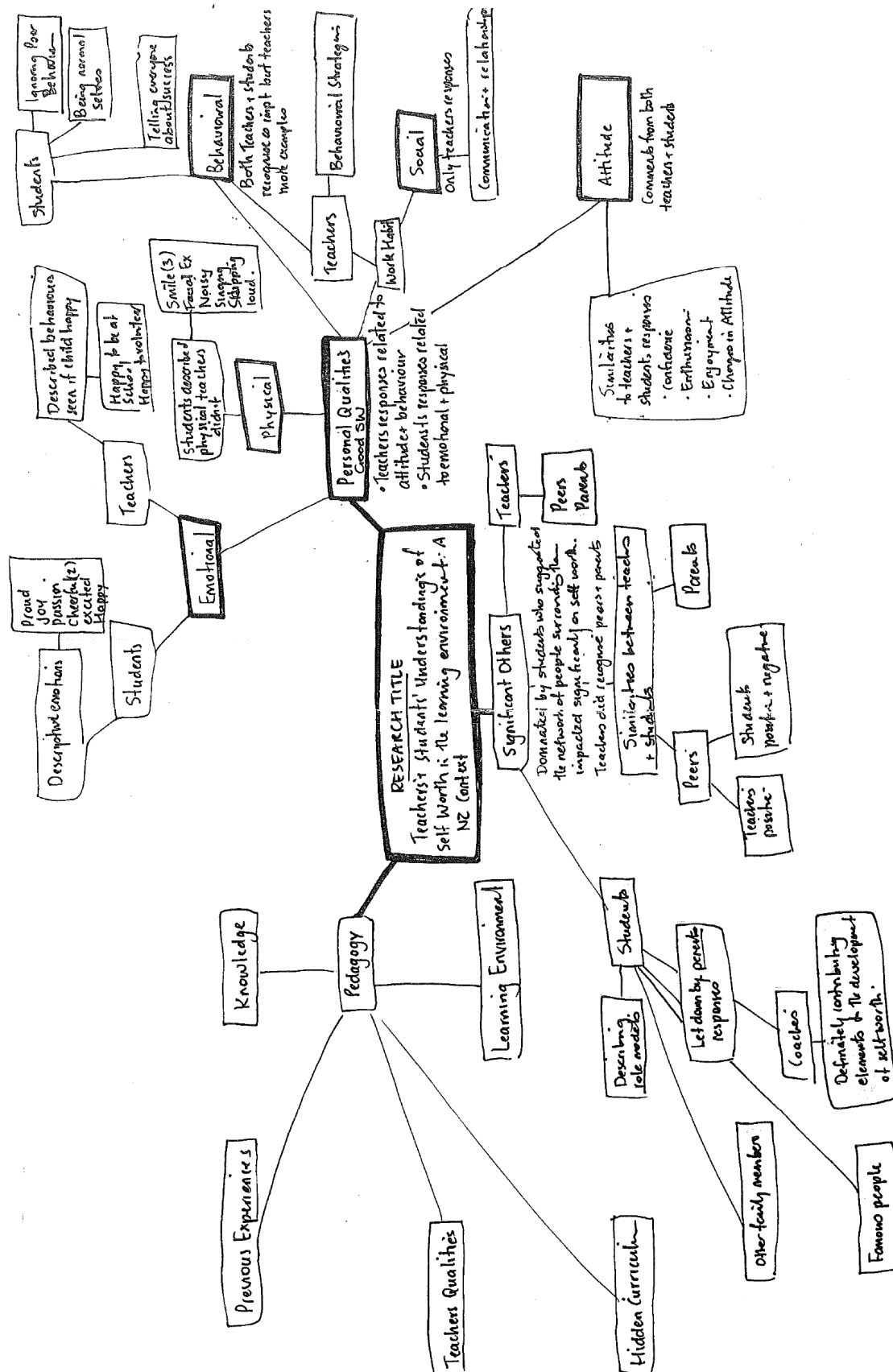
**Signed** \_\_\_\_\_

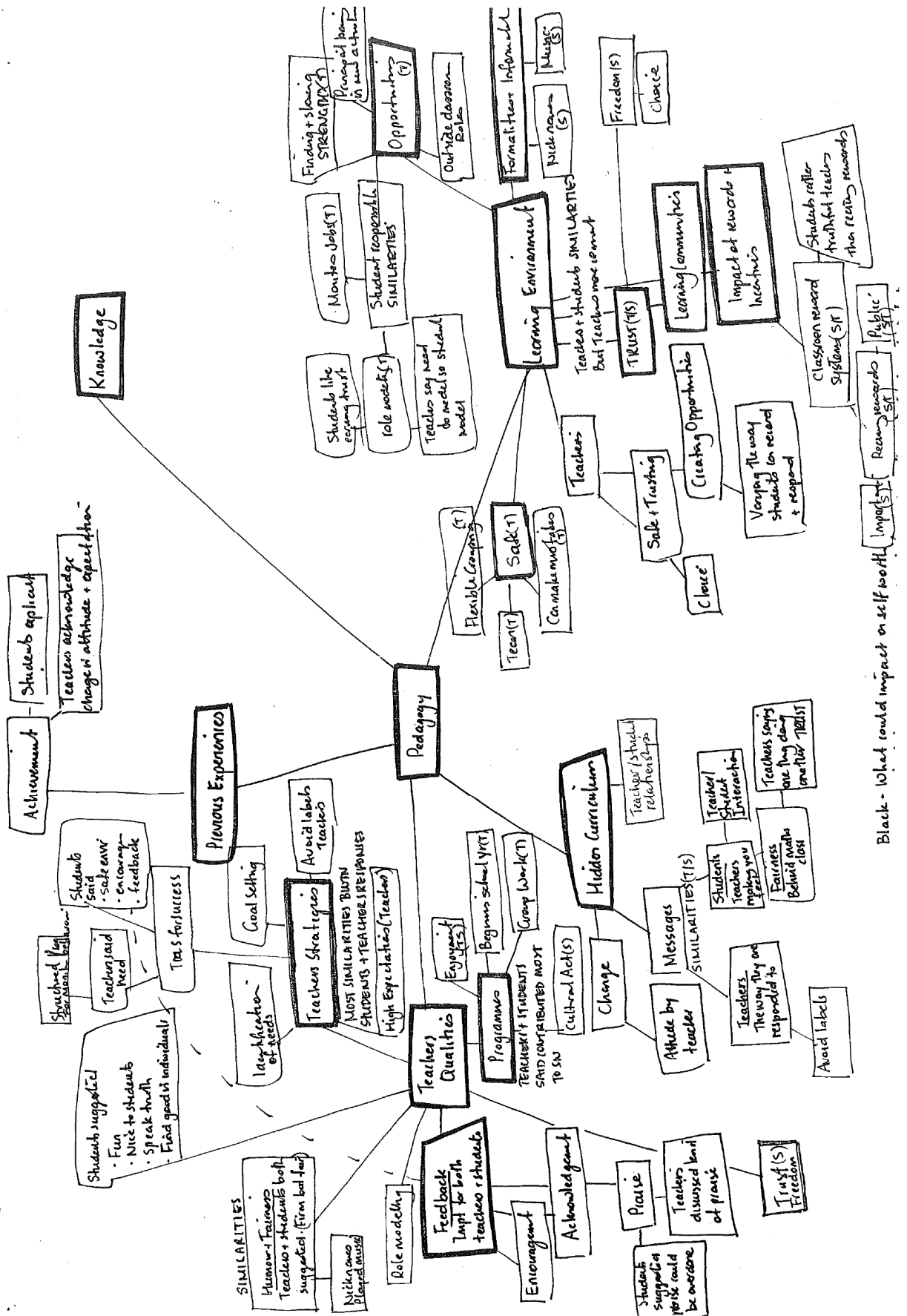
**Date** \_\_\_\_\_

1. This project has received ethical approval from the University of Canterbury, College of Education Ethical Clearance Committee.
2. Complaints may be addressed to:  
Dr. Missy Morton, Chair, Ethical Clearance Committee.  
College of Education, University of Canterbury  
Private Bag 4800, Christchurch

Telephone: (03) 345 8312

## Appendix 8: Mind maps





Black - What could impact on self worth

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